

The Tragic Tale of Trashmouth Tozier (Complete) by DeTrashmouth

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Summary: All 7 parts to this tragic tale of Richie 'Trashmouth' Tozier, where he learns about the true horrors outside of Derry.

1. Chapter 1: A Trashmouth Nightmare

A Trashmouth Nightmare Come True - '89"

The slender blonde left her boyfriend asleep in her mother's bed, as she could have sworn she'd heard a distant voice calling out her name from the window, and outside in the dark of the night.

"Tina..."

When she approached the window, what appeared to be a sharp human tooth had been thrown at the glass, sticking into it.

"Who do you think you are? Whoever you are..." she spoke quietly, to herself. What brought her to do what she did next, she didn't know. It felt just like the nightmares she'd been having for the past two nights. Tina walked downstairs, wearing nothing but her loosely buttoned shirt as she made her way outside, into her backyard to investigate the strange noises.

"Is somebody there?" She called out.

"Tina!" The voice whispered as a hiss. As if drawn to the call, Tina dared herself to walk out into the yard as the voice called her name again. This time more viciously than before.

". TINA!" She jumped, just about out of her skin.

"Who the hell is that!?" Tired of this nightmare, sick of the fear, she braced herself as she pushed onward, walking out of her yard and into the alleyway, stepping slowly in her steps, barefoot and feeling the damp, slick gravel of the road below. Just then, she stray garbage can lid rolled toward her, causing her to whip around, startled to see that's all it was. the lid crashed to the ground, and for a moment, she sighed with relief... But it was merely a ploy, a trick from the ultimate mischief maker. His hatted head grew as a shadow on the shed at the end of the alley, and with it came his morbid cackle. Tina gasped as she turned again, and this time she saw him, the dream demon, the man from her nightmares. His crooked brown fedora that looked black in the night. His charred flesh of a face, which even in the darkness she could see barred the sinister grin of a monster. His creepy red and green sweater in the pattern of stripes.

"Tina..." the man's voice crept through his rotten teeth.

"Oh SHIT-"Her fear was what he wanted. Freddy, he fed on the fear. He loved that shit, seeing his victims tremble in terror before he swooped in to make the kill. This mother fucker was as sadistic as he was masochistic. His arms extended supernaturally as he reached outward, blocking the alley and his razor glove grazed the metal fence beside him, creating a

horrible screeching sound as sparks ignited from the scratching of the blades. Tina's panic only made him giggle like a crazy hyena that much more.

"Please, God..." Tina breathed, shakily.

"This," Freddy held up his weapon next to his mutilated face, finally in enough light for her to get more of a look at the disfigured fuck than she ever would have needed. "... is GOD!"

Fuck this. Tina turned and ran, screaming for her life, as Freddy... Now, being portrayed by a wobbly and very bad stunt double, gave chase. Only for Tina to run right into the REAL Freddy, played to perfection by the one and only Robert Englund, of course! The music kicked in to create a chase scene that was damn well near panic inducing. There was no way for her to escape him now. Freddy was a monster even when he was mortal. But now he was something much, much worse.

And this was it, the moment that started it all. His first kill as the infamous night stalker, which to date, would go on to spawn four sequels...

The 5th movie would be out this August, and the previews for it looked alright. The 2nd one was tacky as hell, but the 3rd and 4th were pretty cool, so he figured the 5th one would be at least watchable, as well. He had seen the first of the series multiple times, though. It was by far his favorite, with part 3 being a close second. But as many times as his parents had told his ass not to watch 'those damn horror pictures,' especially before going to bed... And, well, since when exactly was Richie known for following the rules? Mhm, dats wight wabbit!

Maggie and Wentworth Tozier had left earlier that night to go visit some relatives in Bangor, and it had pretty much been a mutual decision not to bring Richie along. Well, amongst themselves. They had vaguely mentioned the three day weekend, and then just left a note on the fridge informing Richie that he'd be looking after himself, not to burn the house down, and a \$20 bill for pizza.

Richie hadn't really been up to much in the last week, after the Losers' club decided to call it quits when a trip to that creepy old Neibolt house nearly resulted in them getting killed. Ben had gotten clawed by Pennywise, his stomach was now marked by multiple scars. Eddie was left with a broken arm from the ordeal, and now

Richie was only really speaking to Stan the Man. His Bar Mitzvah was coming up soon, and he'd told Rich that he was the only one of them who was invited to it. Not that Richie could blame him, Bill had become obsessed with that fucking clown. It was all just too much for him, it was too much for most of the others as well. Whatever, fuck it anyway.

When he got to the kitchen he found the note. At first he just grabbed a soda and totally missed it, but then he paused, did a double take (the money catching his eye first. Even with bad eyesight and a pair of damaged specs, he could still see the green) and snatched it off the fridge.

"Fuck yeah!" He'd shouted, and immediately ran up to his to gaze at one of the Gem magazines he'd successfully stolen from his dad's sock drawer a few weeks prior. All but three minutes later, he was back downstairs and bored as hell. So, he decided to pop in one of his favorite videos: A Nightmare On Elm Street.

Lounging around in a t-shirt and his tightie-whities, like any self-respecting thirteen year old would when he has the place all to himself. Richie found himself kicked back on the sofa as he pulled the phone up, ordering himself a large-ass pizza, with Tina screaming bloody murder in the background, and her boyfriend Rod watching in horror as she was being dragged up the walls, and Richie was sure that made the pizza guy on the phone feel a bit creeped out, and was delightfully hilarious to him.

The pizza arrived around the time when Johnny Depp was being pulled into his bed, and Richie had tried to argue with the delivery guy that he was late by two minutes, so it should be free. He denied Richie the victory, and though the charge was only for 16 dollars, the guy took the whole twenty and walked away.

"Hey! That wasn't your tip! I want change, asshole!" Richie called out, but the guy just gave him the finger and walked back to his car.

"Oh, fuck you too, dude!" Richie returned the gesture and kicked the door shut with his foot, insuring it closed by inching it shut with his bum-bum.

He hopped back on the couch and began to gorge on the pepperoni and sausage pizza with extra cheese until he was stuffed and the movie had ended. Once again, he found himself bored as shit.

Richie whist away back to the fridge to put his leftovers away, when a single bottle of beer belonging to his father caught his eye

...Dare he?

A devious smirk appeared on his face, and he thought to himself, 'Damn straight.'

With that, he snatched it. Took him damn well five minutes to twist the lid off, and then he took a huge swig, so big of one that the foam the beer began spilling out and erupting from his mouth like a goddamn geyser.

"Whoa!" Richie laughed as he choked, and took another swig of it, prompting him to belch so loudly it echoed through the entire house. "Ahhh.. yeeeah... That's good beer."

He swigged it again. In truth, the beer tasted like total shit, but it made him feel more ...manly or some shit. Yet, he managed to get drunk off his sorry little ass after only four swigs and twenty minutes later. In that time, he had taken to changing into a new shirt, since he'd spilled a good amount of beer on his other (and it already had pizza sauce stains on it, anyway.)

The night had grown dark, Richie was tipsy as fuck and looking for fun. This led him to trade out his glasses for a pair of shades, and click the families cheap stereo on, that actually had some decent volume when turned up to the maximum.

dunDUNdunDUNdunDUNdun.....

The piano chords of the selected song rung all through the house.

dunDUNdunDUNdunDUNdun.....

*Just take those old records off the shelf!
I'll sit and listen to 'em by myself!
Today's music ain't got the same soul...*

I like that old time rock 'n' roll!

Don't try to take me to a disco!

You'll never even get me out on the floor...

In ten minutes I'll be late for the door...

I like that old time rock'n' roll!

Richie Tozier, that damn Trashmouth slid into his living room, with the collar of his shirt popped up as spun around, lip syncing to the words of 'Old Time Rock and Roll' by Bob Seger, much the way he had seen in an older movie. Fuck it, why not?

After dancing around his living room and looking like a total asshole, the stereo crapped out on him. In fact, all the lights in the house went out and Richie let out a sudden scream that even a skirt like 'Beaverly Marshmallow' would have called 'girly as hell.' Fuck her anyway. Who invited Molly Ringwald into the group? Richie stood frozen for a few moments, like he'd been caught doing something he wasn't supposed to, and tried to settle the quick panic attack that had overtaken him and sobered him the fuck up in an instant.

Maybe the power just went out from the storm? Oh, wait, there was no storm... Probably a blown fuse, or something. He'd had his own fuse blown before, so he knew how that went. Well, okay, no he didn't. He was still as big of a virgin in every way, just as the rest of the boys at his school were, but, still...

"Shit... I ain't afraid'a no ghost.." He said to himself.

Just as he decided to pull some pants on, the lights all surprisingly came back on. Whew... Sweet fucking Christ. He'd then figured he would just take it easy for the remainder of the night. Sometimes, being home alone could be a tad bit frightening. During the day it was no big deal, but at night? For three days straight? This could get tiresome after awhile.

Richie sighed and plopped down on the couch again, figuring maybe it was time to put the horror flicks away for awhile and watch something more upbeat and comedic instead, so he settled on Caddyshack. However, he didn't find himself as amused by it as usual. Even the infamous 'Doody' scene at the pool didn't do anything

for him. He was just too damn tense.

He pulled the phone up again and not really wanting to deal with Stan at this hour, he decided to dial Eds' number, hoping to hell his mom wouldn't answer. But she did. Of course she did.

"Kaspbrak residence," she groaned into the phone.

"Hey, Mrs. K, it's Richard Tozier. I was just wondering if I could talk to Eddie real quick-" "No," she grumbled. "It's late, my Eddie is in bed. He needs his rest, you know." "Yeah, I know.. How about just for a minute? It's about school..."

FUCK! Lamest. Excuse. Ever. If she was half as smart as he thought she may have been, which was still pretty damn dim, she'd at least know that school had only been out two fucking months. "I mean, summer school. Which, I'm totally in. And, you know, Eddie is so smart, and all," he tried not to chuckle into the phone. "I just had a math question."

"Oh? Which part?" Sonia asked, curiously.

"Uh... The math part?" Well, smooth cover-up. If any of Eddie's friends would have ended up in summer school, Sonia Kaspbrak would have figured it to be the gangly kid.

"I suppose..." she sighed. "Just for a moment, though."

"Thanks," Richie mouthed some silent choice words at the phone, as well as giving it a certain finger, as he waited for Eds to answer the phone.

"Hello..?" Eddie sudden spoke softly into the phone.

"Hey, ass-wipe," Richie grinned.

"Oh great, what do you want?" Eddie groaned.

"Ah, I was just, you know, sittin' here, takin' crap, thinkin'boutcha."

"EWW, don't call me when you're in the bathroom, dude!" Eddie shrieked

"Don't piss your granny panties, turd burglar! I'm kidding. I'm on my couch, and I only ever shit on this thing like, twice when I was sick last year."

"Hardy har har.." Eddie sounded like he grounded again. "Anyway, I got the place to myself, so I'm just hangin' around, bored." "I'm surprised you're not"

"Not what?"

"Nevermind."

"Tickling my pickle?" Eddie sighed, loudly.

"No."

"Already did, to your mom." The both of them paused for a second, and then Richie realized just what he'd said. This joke backfired miserably, and they both were suddenly disgusted. "Actually no, no I didn't ... Anyway, wanna come over?" Richie asked nonchalantly.

"As if," Eddie said. "You know my mom wouldn't let me out this late."

"So? Tell her you're going to bed then just sneak out the window, dude."

"I could fall and break my neck or something! I've already got a broken arm!"

"What, are you like, allergic to having fun just like everything else?" Richie teased.

"No! I just .. I can't okay?"

"Puuuuuussaaayy!"

"Your face and my butt, trashmouth."

"Oh is that your fuckin' fantasy, you wet-end?" Richie laughed, Eddie, not so much.

"Well I'm doing a horror movie marathon, and-" That's when Richie

heard an all-too-familiar sound, like knives on a metal fence coming from outside his house. Like a quick screech, something sharp scratching against metal, following a creepy sounding cackle...

"What the hell was that?" Eddie hissed quietly into the phone.

"Uhh- nothing. Actually, hey, Eds, I gotta go. Catch ya on the flipside, schlong-breath. Kiss your mommy goodnight for me, ha ha...ha.." Richie laughed, but there was something different in his voice. It sounded trembly and forced, like something was obviously wrong that he was just trying to laugh off. But before Eddie could get curious and ask, he hung the phone up and slowly stood up from his place sitting on the couch.

Richie carefully approached the kitchen and peered out the window, into his backyard. Somehow, even though he had seen his yard at night many times, it looked way, way darker than ever before.

"...Hello?" Richie asked quietly.

There was another sudden screeching sound, which made him jump. And just then, like a scene out of a fucking horror movie, what appeared to be a human tooth was flung at the window.

"No fucking way! Buuuuullshit!" Richie reached for the door handle... But then made sure it was locked, rather than opening it. Just then, the lights flickered out again.

"Nope!" Richie said firmly. "No fucking way I'm going out there. I've seen this movie, I know how the nightmare ends.." And that's when it dawned on him, making him chuckle and facepalm himself. "Wait the fuck a minute... Freddy isn't real. And I'm not even asleep. And, Freddy definitely isn't real... And I'm now talking to myself like some kind of asshole. Awesome, Trashmouth..." he grimaced.

This was all just in his imagination, it had to be, as Stan the Man would say. Movies weren't real, they were just fucking MOVIES! And Richie knew better. He just... had to remind himself of it every now and again. So, to prove he had a set of balls, he unlocked and opened the door, and stepped outside into the night. This was probably a mistake, but he knew it was just his mind playing tricks on him. Just

being alone at night and watching a horror movie. There wasn't actually a tooth stuck in the kitchen window. He hadn't actually heard an eerie screeching noise. And there was no way Freddy was going to be in his backyard. No way. Not likely. Probably not... Hopefully not.

He couldn't lie to himself, he was scared as shit.

Richie made it exactly five steps outside his house when he came to a sudden halt, frozen in place as he heard that terrible screeching sound again. Followed by a creepy cackle, and even worse... The sound of his name being called.

"Riiiiichieeee...."

Oh fuck, no!

The screech came again, but this time it sounded less like knives on a metal surface, and more like the squeaky sound you hear when someone runs their fingers over a... Balloon?

Somehow, even in the darkness, Richie could suddenly make out the shape of a brightly colored red balloon, that didn't quite float away from behind a tree, but just sort of lingered there, bobbing back and forth in the air. That's when he saw the eyes, big, bright yellow, almost golden eyes, glowing out from the enormous white head, with bright orange hair surrounding it. Not Freddy Krueger, not a guy whose skin was charred, with a hat nor red and green striped sweater. It was, what appeared to be, a clown. A fucking clown. That fucking clown. They'd always bothered Richie, after a terrifying experience he'd had as an toddler, when one of them jumped out at him during a circus. But now, seeing this one in his backyard, The same one from Neibolt street... The clown that seemed to look at him hungrily, and with a sinister grin that matched it's horrifying cackle of a laughter...

No way. No fucking way.

"Oh god-" Richie began- catching himself uttering a similar phrase from the movie he'd only just watched hours ago. Don't say it... Don't say it... Please don't fucking say it.

"This..." The clown spoke lowly, holding up not a razor glove on it's hand, but a terrible claw, with long, jagged, razor-sharp fingernails.
"Is GOD!"

The clown suddenly broke out into a hysterical, rabid, hyena-like laughter and scratched the surface of the balloon, popping it in a loud POP that sounded like a gunshot.

"AAAHH!" Richie screamed, he couldn't do anything else. He was stunned, too terrified to move. This wasn't real, it couldn't be real. It was definitely real. All the shit those other losers had spoken about before they bashed Bowers' head in with a rain of rocks. It was all real. Fuck me.

"Beep beep, RICHIE!" The clown called out to him, nastily. Mocking him. Taunting him, sadistically seeming to enjoy the fact that he was shaking in place. Then, the clown let out an even more terrifying roar, something like Richie had never heard in his life. It didn't sound human, or even animal-like. The only thing Richie could think of it sounding was like some kind of monster.
**"THETURTELCAN"THELPYOUTHETURTELCAN"THELPYOU
HAHAHAHA!"**

Richie let out another cry, but it was deafened by the sound of the monsters' horrible laughter. That's when it lunged at him, as quick and viciously as it could. It was so close to him that he could smell and even feel the warm foulness of it's breath on his fucking face!

Richie didn't even think about moving, he acted on pure instincts, spinning around so fast that his glasses were whipped off his face, and with blurred vision in the darkness, he hurried back into his house and slammed the door shut as hard as he could, slipping onto the floor and face-planting roughly. He spun around onto his back, out of breath and horrified, as he forced himself to push off and crawl backwards until his back roughly clashed into the kitchen wall.

Panting harshly and shaking, Richie hugged his knees and trembled as he rested, trying to catch his breath. It was over now. That fucking clown was outside, and now that he was back in his house, he was safe, right? .. Right?

Tap.. tap... tap...

Richie's eyes jerked open. He was looking at the floor, with his horribly bad vision. But his eyes slowly moved upwards toward the door. No...

TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP!

Even with his fucked-up eyesight, Richie could make out the vague shape of the giant clown standing right outside the window, its claw-like fingers had been caught in the door frame, and were wiggling, tapping its nails on the wooden panel. When his eyes finally adjusted, he could see two bright yellow lights of its eyes, peering in at him. Its mouth was wide open, its head slightly tilted back, revealing a series of Jaws-like fangs and making an odd groaning kind of low sound from its throat. In Its other hand, it held up Richie's glasses, right up to its face... and then popped them into its gutter of a mouth and proceeded to chew them up in wicked little crunches like they were candy. Its head then jerked back down at him, and the look it was giving him was nothing short of evil. It was staring right at him now, viciously, angrily, so intimidatingly.

It hadn't caught him, and it was obviously quite upset about this. Its eyes then narrowed downward to its fingers, still stuck in the door, and they seemed to... melt? Becoming paper-thin, the fingers were then suctioned loose from the door and then held back up by its face, so that Richie could see they took a solid form again, inflating like slender balloons. It cackled terrifyingly once more, and using both hands now, it began scratching on the window. Slowly at first, but progressively becoming more and more quick and viciously.

"Let me in, Trashmouth!" The clown called at him. **"BEEP FUCKING BEEP, YOU FOUR-EYED, FOUL-MOUTHED LITTLE FUCKER! LET ME IN - LET ME IN - LET ME IN! YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO! WE'LL WATCH SCARY MOVIES AND HAVE A GOOD TIME TOGETHER. WE'LL DRINK YOUR DADDY'S BOOZE AND I'LL JERK YOU OFF 'TIL YOUR DICK RIPS OFF! IT'LL BE AN AWFULLY GOOD TIME TEEHEEHEE! COME ON, LET ME IN!"** The clown ordered him, laughing some more. IT was thoroughly enjoying the fear it was inflicting on him.

"NO!" Richie screamed as he slammed his eyelids shut tight and covered up his ears as hard as he could, shaking his head back and forth and crying until he was certain the laughter of the clown had stopped. "NO NO NO NO NO! GO AWAY!"

Daring to open his eyes again, he saw that the clown had indeed vanished from the window. Shakily, Richie stood up and clutched his arms around himself, feeling a cold chill down his spine and getting goosebumps even though this summer was hot as hell.

He took baby-steps toward the door, in what would have normally taken him three seconds to get from one side of the kitchen to the other, took him almost a minute now. When he got there, he peered out the window, from left to right, from up to down... The clown was gone. It was fucking gone.

Richie reached up to grab the lock of the door, and turned the bolt sideways, insuring that it was locked good and tightly. But just as he did so, another red balloon floated right up to the window, and BURST right outside of it.

Richie jumped back again, and in the distance, he could swear he heard the echo fading out of that fucking clown's sinister laughter.

The lights flickered again until they came back on, and Richie's heart-rate slowly returned to something like a normal pace. He let out a good, long sigh and rubbed his bright red burning cheeks with still trembling hands. After taking a few minutes to calm down, he grabbed the remainder of the bottle of beer he had been sipping on earlier and surprisingly chugged the rest of it down in one big gulp, which choked him. He didn't care, he needed that.

No more scary movies for Richie, at least not for awhile. Not while he was home alone at night, that was for damn fucking sure. He stumbled through his house as he made his way back to his room, tripping over his feet several times before just shutting his eyes and making his way by memory and feel. He got to his room and opened the drawer next to his bed, taking out a pair of older spare glasses (his parents had bought three in total, due to his habit of fucking them up so often. The previous pair had been damaged during the rock war and needed to be trashed, anyway. So, no major loss.)

He put them on his face and decided to just shut his door, and locked it. Turning on his radio, Richie found a nice, relaxing song by 'The Lover Speaks' and spent the remainder of his night reading comic books, for sure intending to pull an all nighter. That was until he slowly but surely drifted off to sleep, and surprisingly, he didn't have a nightmare that night.

*No more "I love you's"
Language is leaving me
No more "I love you's"
Language is leaving me exiled
No more "I love you's"
Changes are shifting me outside the words*

*I used to have demons
In my room at night
Desire, despair, desire
So many monsters
Oh but now ...*

*I don't catch myself
Bouncing home whistling
Buttonhole tunes to make me cry...*

The next morning, once he had awakened and found the courage to venture into his backyard, he took notice that the window wasn't scratched up, nor did it have a human tooth embedded in it. He actually, for a moment, believed it all had just been some kind of fucked up nightmare... Until he found the remnants of his literally chewed-up glasses in the yard. The lenses were completely gone, short of a shard or two of glass still attached to the hollowed-out frames. What freaked him out even more, is that they were smothered in blood.

Almost immediately after getting back inside, and after scarfing down a piece of cold pizza, Richie phoned Eddie again to ask what the chances were of spending the rest of the weekend at his place. Yeah, he was that desperate after last night.

Who the fuck wouldn't be?

2. Chapter 2: Richie Faces his Fears

"I must be the exception that proves the rule, Big Bill."

"Are you sure there was nothing, Richie? Nothing at all?"

Richie had been killing another boring day at the Arcade, playing Street Fighter and pretending the character that his own was beating, was in fact his friend - old friend now, Bill Denbrough. Every time he punched the character in the face, Richie was imagining it was him striking Bill, much the way he'd struck him that day they went to Neibolt Street. He was winning, too. He'd gotten pretty good with all the time and practice, and money he'd put into this game and was determined eventually get his initials at the very top for the highest score.

But his fun had come to an abrupt end when Richie had been suddenly startled to see none other than Henry Bowers, Victor Criss, and Belch emerge from the theater.

Oh, shit... He hoped he wouldn't be noticed, but was spotted when Henry looked into the arcade; so did Belch, after he gave Vic a shove.

"Well what the fuck do you know about this," Henry said. "Richie Fuckin' Tozier, one of the rock-throwers! Where's your loser friends at, asshole?"

Shit, indeed.

"My friends are outside -" Richie tried to say as he backed away from the game, trying to get to the door.

"Oooh, his friends are outside, Henry!" Victor squealed in a mockingly high-pitched voice. Henry didn't grin, though, he had a look full of rage in his eyes.

Richie backed up and tried to call out for help, but all that he could manage were a bunch of stammering sounds, like Bill sometimes made when he stuttered. Richie realized all at once that he was truly alone, and this is why Beverly had been right; 'This is what IT wants, IT wants to divide us. We we're all together when we hurt it, that's

why we're still alive!

Not just about the clown, but just being together in general. Now here Richie was, face to face with who might have been Pennywise Jr. for all he cared. Henry was just as crazy as his fucking father, and after the rock fight, he looked like he may have been even crazier.

"I don't mind taking you one by one. Come here, you little four-eyed fuck!"

Victor stood beside Henry; Belch trailed behind them, smiling in a porky vacant way.

"Come on, fuckface!" Henry said. "You remember what you said to me that day? Let's talk about that, huh. What was it? Something about blowing my dad? Is that what the fuck you said to me?"

Fuck. Fuck. FUCK!

Henry darted forward and made to grab him. Richie whirled around to make a get away, but they were surrounding him like sharks.

"Got any rocks on you?" Henry asked, advancing across the distance between them.

"Fuck off-" Richie said, trembling. But at that moment, Henry's hand shot out incredibly fast, and smacked Richie's cheek with a blunt force. Richie's head rocked from the impact.

"Ahh!" Richie tried to turn, but Henry lashed out again before he could, and this time hitting his other cheek, both of which would be swollen and have matching bruises now.

'Don't cry,' Richie thought in that instance. 'That's what they want. Don't fucking cry.'

Belch stepped forward and gave Richie a hard open-handed push, Richie stumbled and then lost his balance completely and landed onto Vic, who began laughing like a hyena and slapping at his stomach, giving his skin a harsh burn. Richie yelped in pain as he turned towards the door to get the hell out of there, but only ran face-first into Bowers himself.

"Don't got any rocks now, do ya rock-man?" Henry raved down at him, and Richie was more frightened by Henry's eyes than he was by the pain he was feeling from the others now. Henry was out for blood, his blood, all the losers' blood. "You wanna throw rocks, Tozier? Huh?!" Bowers made a move on him, just as Belch and Victor did from the other sides. Richie thought fast and with no where to go, simply ducked to the ground. The result, was that the three of them collided into each other and tumbled to the ground like bowling pins.

With not a moment to spare, Richie crawled hurriedly away from them and got to his feet, hauling ass towards the door. But of course, being Richie, the 'Trashmouth,' he had to turn around to get one last word in, and a certain finger gesture.

"Suck my sack, you bunch'a fuckin' stooges!"

"YOU'RE FUCKING DEAD!" Henry screamed with a furious hatred for this particular loser.

Uh oh.

Just as fast as Richie fled from the arcade, Henry and his goons were up and giving chase like bats out of Hell. Richie ran for his literal life and turned to run across the street. He was almost struck by several cars as he made his grand escape, passing the alley with the infamous Bradley Gang mural as the three of them sprawled out of the arcade.

"Belch, get the fucking car, we're going to kill this son of a bitch!" Henry demanded as Belch ran his fat ass into the parking lot, leaving the other two to scope out where Richie had ran to.

Unfortunately, he hadn't been as fast as he hoped, and was spotted just as he'd turned the corner.

"There!" Victor cried out, pointing across the street. "Tozier!" "Let's fucking get him!" Henry screamed as the two gave chase in his direction.

Belch had hopped into his car, and started it up as Iron Maiden's classic hit blared thunderously. Richie had just about made it out the other side of the alley, by the butcher shop when he saw the blue

Trans Am coming flying straight at him.

*- NIGHT WAS BLACK, WAS NO USE HOLDING BACK!
CAUSE I JUST HAD TO SEE, WAS SOMEONE WATCHING ME?!
IN THE MIST, DARK FIGURES MOVE - AND - TWIST!
WAS ALL THIS FOR REAL, OR JUST SOME KIND OF HELL?!*

"OH SHIT-!"

Richie turned to run back down the alley, but even faster now, Henry and Vic were giving chase and closing in. He had no where to go but straight to the great beyond. But he wasn't going to become Bowers' first real victim, not today.

Despite being so scrawny, Richie Tozier was a fast little fuck, even Bowers had to admit that, begrudgingly so. He managed to dodge Henry's advance and hooked a swift left around the alley's corner, nicking his shoulder as he crashed into the side of the brick wall and hollering as he did so. But he wasn't dead yet.

'Tis but a flesh wound!" Richie thought to himself, and kept running.

Bowers and Vic got to the edge of the alley, and quickly hopped into Belch's car.

"Move your fucking ass!" Henry screamed at Belch, and the car peeled out, driving down the road as Richie ran down the sidewalk.

He ran faster than he ever had in his life, and figured its because he thought it might be the last thing he'd ever do. And just up ahead, he thought he saw his saving grace in the Freese's Department Store.

Damn well near winded to the point of fainting at that point, Richie kept telling himself to just go a little more, a little bit further. He could make it to the store, and if he did, he would be safe. They wouldn't dare chase him into there. And through the struggle, he'd surprised even himself when he managed to make it.

But Bowers was a determined, crazy son of a bitch. Just as fast as Richie had gotten into the store, holding his wounded shoulder and catching his breath, he peeked out the glass door and saw the three of them had parked crooked in the lot and were still coming for him.

"Jesus, these assholes just don't quit ..." Richie gasped, and turned to make his way through the store.

But Henry and his goons had been right behind him, not letting up by a long shot. Richie ran through the store and found himself almost slipping as his shoes skidded through a puddle on the floor. As if by some kind of miracle, the overhead pipes right by the display of stuffed plushie turtles had been dripping all day and made quite a mess upon the store's marble floor. Mr Fazio, the manager of Freese's, ordered his workers to keep the water mopped up and for what it was worth, they'd been cleaning it on and off all day. But it was no use, and eventually they just put up a CAUTION! WET FLOOR! sign on a little easel.

Richie hadn't fallen, but Henry and the others weren't so lucky. They were moving too fast, too easily distracted in sheer irony of focusing so intently on ending that Trashmouth's life. Looking back over his hurt shoulder, he heard a loud thud and saw that Henry had slipped in the puddle, and fallen to the floor so damn hard, with Belch landing on him and Vic going down last.

Before Richie could stop it his mouth from doing what it did best, he called out; "Way to go, banana-heels!" Smirking, he seized the opportunity to hurry through the store and exit out the back, finally getting the fuck away from the madness. But not before he heard Henry's final battle-cry.

"You're fucking dead, Trashmouth!" Henry called out, as serious as a heart attack. "You're so dead they're gonna have to bury you twice!"

And so at long last, Richie had escaped an early demise. He'd been beat, but not beaten, and with that he considered himself rather accomplished. Richie began his long trek home, trying to ignore the burning stings from all the wounds he had gotten with his little encounter with Bowers that day. Half way home, he decided to take a rest in front of City Center, where he'd spent the 4th of July with his then-best friends, his only friends.

He was utterly fucking spent. He'd just gotten down to a bench just to the left of the Paul Bunyan statue, when he collapsed and thought about how good a cold glass of iced water would be right about now.

Which made him chuckle, because he never drank water. He was strictly a soda-pop kinda kid. But right now? Water sounded so fucking good.

After just a bit of a rest to collect his bearings, Richie would get up and head home for the day. But for now, it just felt too good to rest up in the afternoon sun. There were some clouds gathering in the distance and he thought it might rain, but for now, he'd enjoy the weather as well as he could.

Richie let out a good-hearty yawn, and felt the feeling of vertigo slowly creeping in. Falling asleep now would be bad, he knew that. Bowers and... well, other threats were still out there. They would always be there. He was only ever truly safe in his home, his room, or with his friends ... Except he didn't have friends anymore. Just Stanley, and Eddie, who he barely saw as it was.

This thought hurt him ever so slightly, but he was still so pissed at Bill, and Beverly. Fuck those losers. He'd be just as happy to move away and never see any of them again. And he would, one day. He promised himself that. One day, indeed, he would move out to California and become famous, and finally have people appreciate his comedic talents.

One day...

Thinking of this, Richie breathed slowly and let his head fall onto his remaining good shoulder, and his eyes got heavy. He would only close them for a moment, he told himself. Just a few seconds...

That's when he suddenly felt warm swash of air into his face. It blew his hair back from his forehead and woke him the hell up in an instant. What the fuck was that?

When Richie opened his eyes looked up, he found himself frozen completely solid as that hideous Paul Bunyan statue was gone now. Vanished. Was David Copperfield in town or something... No, he would never come to Derry.

Richie heard the lowest roar of a giant's breath just off to his right, and gulped, slowly turning to see his fear had come true. Paul's huge

plastic face was right there! Bigger than Richie had ever imagined it to be from all the times he'd grimace when he passed the damn thing. The stature was bending down, looking at him fiercely and yet grinning, although it didn't exactly look like Paul Bunyan anymore. Its body was beginning to tear apart as it got in motion. It had tufts of red-orange hair stuck out of its head, its nose was now round and red. Its eyes were glowing bright yellow, no - golden yellow, with a hint of orange to them.

The statue stood up all at once and lifted the axe up, moving so fast and yet seemingly in a form of slow motion, and with that, the blunt end of the axe head crushed a trench in the concrete of the sidewalk. He was still grinning, but there was nothing cheery about it now. From between gigantic, rigged fangs, a smell flew from its breath that reminded Richie of dead, rotten animals, like road kill left out in the sun to bake.

"YOU'RE FUCKING DEAD, TRASHMOUTH." The giant roared in a husky, rumbling voice, quoting Bowers. Its voice caused everything to rumble like some kind of earthquake all around him. **"YOU'RE SOOO DEAD THEY'RE GONNA HAVE TO BURY YOU TWICE! HEEEEHEHEURHURHURHURHUR DEE HURRRR!"**

The giant began to laugh as it ripped its axe and pulled it out of the crater in what was left of sidewalk. As the axe began to rise into the air, it made a low but lethal hissing sound.

Ssssswwiiiiiiisshhhhh...

Richie suddenly understood that the giant meant to split him right down the middle. But was paralyzed in fear.

"IS ALL THIS FOR REAL," the giant had rumbled, quoting the lyrics to the Iron Maiden song Richie had heard earlier. **"OR JUST SOME KIND OF HELL?!"**

As the axe rose up and slowed in motion, in his mind, Richie thought he heard an oldies song playing; The Dovells 'Bristol Stomp.'

*The kids in Bristol are sharp as a pistol -
When they do the Bristol Stomp!*

*Really somethin' when they join in jumpin
When they do the Bristol Stomp!*

Whoa, oh!

*They start spinnin every Friday night
They dance the greatest and they do it right!
Well it's the latest, it's the greatest sight, to see!
The kids in Bristol are sharp as a pistol - Whoa, oh!*

*When they do the Bristol Stomp! Whoa, oh!
Really somethin' when they join in jumpin
When they do the Bristol Stomp! Whoa, oh!*

He tried to scream but his mouth had betrayed him, he couldn't make a sound. Richie rolled off the bench and onto the raked ground, just as the giants grin had become more sinister. Its blood-red lips were pulled back and ripping, looking distorted and wicked.

The blade of the axe struck the bench where Richie had been only an instant before. The edge was so sharp that there was almost no sound at all, but the bench was sheared instantly in two.

Richie was on his back. Still trying to scream. Paul, towering above him, looking down at him with eyes the size of manhole covers; there was Paul, looking down at one small boy cowering on the gravel.

The giant took a step toward him. Richie felt the ground shudder when the black boot came down. Gravel spumed up in a cloud. Richie rolled over and staggered to his feet. His legs were already trying to run before he up and able and as a result he fell flat on his face, getting the wind knocked out of him for the second time in one day. God, he couldn't keep this shit up. He thought Bowers had been scary, but this, this thing was unreal. This was a real fucking monster.

Wheezing for air, momentarily wondering if this is how Eds felt all the time, Richie scrambled to get to his feet and ran as fast as he could. His glasses flew wildly from left to right as he slammed them to his face so hard he was sure he'd have two black eyes, and was lucky not to have broken them. He could just hear his mother now,

nagging him in the back of his mind: 'Honestly, Richie, do you think there's a glasses-tree somewhere and we can just pull off a new pair of spectacles for you whenever you break a pair?'

As he lay on the ground awaiting certain death, he could hear that awful persistent whisper of ol' Paul pulling his axe up again.

Ssssswwiiiiiiisshhhhh...

Richie ran out of Paul's monstrous shadow and got into sunlight once again, before he fell again onto the ground. Looking up, Richie caught one glance of the giant; It was going in for the kill.

Oh fuck...

He shut his eyes tightly and hugged his knees, feeling as if this was it. This is how his life would end. With nothing left to do, he began chanting and ; "IT ISN'T REAL IT ISN'T REAL IT ISN'T REAL!"

Richie waited to be sliced, or possibly smashed to death, but as he screamed the words, he had convinced himself it truly wasn't real, none of this was happening. It couldn't. His fear was nonsense. When he didn't feel himself being split in two, he at last risked opening his eyes and saw... Nothing.

The statue of Paul Bunyan was back standing on its pedestal where it always stood, axe on its shoulder. 'Just a statue... Just a fucking statue,' Richie thought.

The bench that had been sheared in two was whole again, and the gravel where Tall Paul had planted his huge foot back to normal, safe for the scuffed spot where Richie had fallen. There were no giant footprints in the ground, no axe-slashes in the concrete. No evidence that any of that had transpired at all.

"Shit," Richie gasped, trying to find his breath as he began chuckling a little. Ol' Paul had gotten off a good one... And managed to cause him to lose control of his bodily fluids. Looking down at his faded blue jeans now, the spot around his crotch and thighs was a certain darker shade of blue. Warm and soiled.

Groaning, Richie picked himself up and brushed himself off, taking a

quick glance around to see if anyone was watching .. But more honestly? He feared that fucking clown. And that statue. And Bowers. Most of all, though, he realized he feared being alone most.

That, and getting a rash from these watered down jeans. Richie needed to rush home and change, pronto.

Fuck, he couldn't wait to get out of Derry.

One day...

3. Chapter 3: On the Road to Hollywood

The day had *finally* come.

The further away from Maine he got, or more specifically, from Derry, the less Richie seemed to remember that he had ever even lived there. And the more he sunk into the persona, this character that had been created for him by the cats of Comedy Central, 'Rich Records,' what was left of the 'real' Richie Tozier slowly ceased to exist.

Los Angeles, California. Richie Tozier was finally home.

Not really, but it's how he felt the moment he cruised down the road and counted down the miles on the signs that eventually led him to Hollywood. He cranked up the radio to a Billy Idol tune which seemed appreciate for his travel to such a big city.

*Here she comes now, sayin' Mony Mony
Shoot 'em down, turn around, come on Mony
Hey! She give me love and I feel all right now
Yeah, you gotta toss and turn*

*And feel all right, yeah I feel all right
I said yeah, (yeah)
Yeah, (yeah)
Yeah! (Yeah!)
Yeah! (Yeah!)
Yeah! (Yeah!)*

*Cause you make me feel...
So good, so good, so good!
So fine, so fine!*

*It's all mine,
Well I feel all right
I said yeah, (yeah)
Yeah, (yeah)
Yeah! (Yeah!)
Yeah! (Yeah!)*

Yeah! (Yeah!)

Yeah! (Yeah!)

The place seemed like a never-ending story, minus a big luck dragon to let him ride around on. There were so many sights to see, he didn't even know where to begin. But what caught his eye before anything else was this great big store on Selma Ave called 'The Record Parlour.' He instantly got excited, almost nervous even, like he was having an anxiety fit. He hadn't felt that way since ... he couldn't remember. Rich parked his car and scoped the place out. Yeah, this definitely felt like home to him.

When he walked into the old record store, '*Gimme Danger*' by Iggy Pop and the Stooges was playing and Rich knew this was the place he was meant to be. He immediately ran to the 'classic rock' section, although truth be told, the store didn't offer anything made maybe after 1997. This place was an entire classic rock section, selling the best vinyls he'd ever laid all four of his eyes on.

"You a collector?" An older guy on a little step-stool looked down at Richie and asked.

"Me?" He shook his head. "No. Well, kind of. Maybe. More like, I want to be. I basically sold my whole collection to afford moving out here."

"I hear that," the old man chuckled harmlessly.

"That's how this store came to be."

"People selling their records?"

"Yeah," The old man stepped off the stool. "Every album in here was someone's baby at one point in time. Always promised the people I'd take good care of 'em. Make sure they're sold to the right people, ya know."

"Oh, yeah, no, I can completely respect that." Richie thumbed his way through a row of records, and his eyes lit up when he came across one that looked familiar to him. Not his, but one he had once owned.

T.N.T by AC/DC

"Ahhh, good eye, son!" The man exclaimed.

"Yeah, all four of them, haha.." Richie adjusted his glasses.

"Lemme guess, comedian?"

"One day, hopefully."

"You have the look. You want that album?" The old man asked.

"Oh, I couldn't afford it right now..." Richie sighed.

"I can see you have a true appreciation for the classics," the man smiled, taking the album from him carefully and inspecting it "Tell ya what, consider it a gift. Welcome to Hollywood," and handed it back to him.

"Are you serious!?"

"Hell no, boy!" He yanked it back from him, and Richie tried not to frown. But then the man smirked. "I was a comedian once, too."

"Oh, haha. Oh, yeah-" Richie held his finger out, trying to figure if this guy had ever been famous. The man shook him off.

"Nah, no one you would'a ever heard of. I didn't make it. Opened a record store instead." "Oh, I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I always said if I didn't get famous, I'd want to own a classic record store."

"Living the dream, right?" Richie chuckled.

"Hell no, you kiddin'? That whole 'if you enjoy what you do for a living you never work a day in your life' is fuckin' bullshit."

For some reason as the man said this, Richie thought he was suddenly time-traveling and meeting a future version of himself. Not bad. "You'll see... But just in case you make it, how about an autograph? That way I can say another celebrity shopped here once."

"Fair trade!" Richie smiled and followed the man over to the counter,

where he bagged the vinyl and Richie signed his name on a piece of paper that the older man took and read.

"You write too damn neat, Mr. Richie Tozier," The man said. "You need a signature."

"Oh... Should I try again?"

"Nah, this'll do." The man turned around and tossed the paper on a whole pile of them. Other wannabe's who didn't quite make it, Richie figured. Behind the man's desk, he had a bunch of autographs of celebrities who did, framed and hanging up.

"George Carlin was here?!" Richie thought he'd read on one of the scribbles.

"Bet your ass," The man smiled and tossed the bag at Richie. "Enjoy the album, and come again. Now, piss off, I've got work to do."

"Haha, thanks!"

"And hey, break a leg out there," the old man called out.

"Dat's wight, wabbit," Richie smirked.

As Rich walked out of the store he read a sign that claimed '*100,000+ Vinyl Records, Restored Audio Gear, Vintage Jukeboxes, & Music Posters.*' and knew without a doubt that when he had the money to spend, he'd be back. Bet your ass, he'd be back.

That was the first good thing to happen to Richie upon arriving in L.A... And as he'd soon find out, it'd be one of the only few good things to happen to him, at all. Hollywood was not for everyone, and as much as he felt he belonged there, he quickly realized that the rest of the nearly four million people all had come here foolishly chasing the same dream. The pile of autographs in The Record Parlour should have tipped him off, but Richie was overly confident, and was about to learn the hard way that comedy was more than just getting on stage and telling funny jokes. It was show business, not show fun.

Richie had grown up the class clown, and but all those years of being the center of attention after his parents neglected him seemed lost the

moment he stepped up on the stage. A little club called The Improv Space was where he booked his first gig. Well, 'gig' was giving it a little too much credit. This wasn't even an audition to do a real set on stage. The Improv Space was nothing more than a little karaoke style bar where anyone could get up and perform, and no one really paid attention. They didn't even get paid. If he was going to make a living following his dreams, he needed the practice of performing, but this just wasn't going to cut it.

A little guy with some lousy jokes had just finished, got a few slow claps, and then Richie saw his opening and took to the stage. He felt pretty good until he got up there, even though the place was dead, suddenly all the eyes were on him, and he felt the anxiety begin to set in.

"Uh-" The microphone screeched with horrible feedback, he tapped it a few times. The crowd cringed. "Hey, everybody. I know what you're thinking, 'who's this guy in the big glasses and Hawaiian shirt?' Haha, well, I'm Richie Tozier."

Nothing. Silence. The crowd, what little audience there was, didn't give a shit. Best to skip the introduction and just go on with the rest of his act, which he'd scribbled on his palm with a pen that was being sweated off by the moment.

"Uh, uh.." Richie stammered. "Just moved out here to L.A. It's great, isn't? Seeing that big Hollywood sign up close... Wish someone would'a told me it smells like one giant fart, though. What, do people here just let them rip all at once to create some kind of giant fart cloud or something? L.A: The Golden State, when it isn't brown and smells like shit," Richie laughed at his own joke. He was the only one who did. Honestly, it sounded so much funnier in his head...

"Speaking of shit," Richie sighed. "How bad am I sucking right now? Like, seriously, I've wanted to be a stand-up comedian all my life and now that I'm here, I don't think I could suck more even if I had a big fat cock in my mouth right now."

This... This got a reaction. Maybe that would be his shtick, talking about how much he sucked. The crowd didn't quite laugh, but there were a few snickers. Fuck his act, maybe self-loathe is what would

win the room over.

"Right? Like everyone wants to make it in Hollywood, but there's a good chance anyone who does took a shot in the mouth to get to where they are today. For my money that explains Tom Cruise..."

That one didn't really go over well, but any reaction was better than nothing at all.

"I'm glad to be here though. L.A. On Stage. It's better than just sitting in my tiny crap-hole apartment and watching TV all day like Beavis and Butt-head. *"Uhhh.. uhuhah.. uhaha..."* He laughed as Butt-head. *"Hemh.. hehmeh.. heheugh.. yeah... Firee... FFFFIREEEEE..."* Richie cackled as Beavis.

This is what got the biggest reaction of the room. His jokes may not have landed, but hearing them out loud, he could understand why. His voices had been pretty good, though.

The owner of the club signaled him that his time was up, and he thanked the room, only really getting as much of a reaction with applause as the last guy did. All in all... Rich had bombed pretty damn hard. But a few claps for his first time wasn't so bad - He quickly ran back up to the mic to get one last say in.

"Thank you for being gentle, it was my first time," Richie smirked. "And that's still more of a reaction I got after I lost my virginity."

This actually did get a little laugh, and he'd take it. Moving off stage, he was ready to just throw up as he tried to hurry out of the club. Rich was stopped by the manager, though.

"Hey, kid-" The big guy said.

"I'm sorry-" Richie tried.

"Huh?" The big guy frowned. "I was just going to say that wasn't too bad, and you should try again. Work on some material. Come back next week, we get a bigger crowd in here on Friday."

"...So, I can come back?" Richie asked, confused.

"Uh, yeah. Unless you shit on the stage, then I'd throw your ass out."

"I think I can manage not doing that," Richie joked.

He did come back that Friday night, too. He did so on the weekend, as well. Each time he got on the stage he did better than the last, until he was finally offered a spot at another club. Bigger than this one, which meant a larger crowd. He bombed sometimes, got some good laughs at others. Reactions varied, his actual jokes that he worked hard on never really brought the laughs. His complaining about how much he sucked always got a couple giggles, and his voices were a big hit.

Finally he began getting some actual reviews in from critics, who were relentless in how bad they trashed up and coming comedians. Every time he saw his name in the papers, small publishing's with only the faintest of recognition, he saw that most reviewers seemed to agree on one thing; 'While newcomer Richie Tozier doesn't always land his jokes, with a little practice, he could actually be a decent impressionist.'

Okay, he thought. Alright, yeah. Fair enough. He'd learned early on this was the kind of business where you checked your emotions at the door. It hurt, having people say how unfunny he could be. But still, he was never told he sucked bad enough that he should just quit. Even the most negative of reviews offered words of encouragement.

'Even George Carlin couldn't win them all. Richie Tozier definitely doesn't. His jokes are often crude in nature, leaning on foul language and self-pity as a crutch and relying too much on the negative aspects of his life to get the room on his side. He is still worthy of checking out, though. Even if it's just to see how badly he'll bomb during a set. Whether it's part of his act or not, his nerves seem to get the better of him more often than not. But when he does an impression of someone - be it a famous person or an infamous cartoon character, there's never a moment of doubt in the recognition of who it he's mimicking.'

Richie actually cut that article out and framed it, mainly taking from it that the critic had compared him to George Carlin.

One night during a show, he absolutely fucking killed it. While he may not have won the whole room over, this was his first time in the actual spot-light on a stage with real speakers. Some guy kept laughing at everything he said, hysterical, hyena roars of laughter. Finally Richie had to draw attention to it.

"Who the hell is that?" He asked. "Someone make sure that guy hasn't wet himself." The guy didn't take offense, he just laughed more, prompting Richie to laugh as well.

"So anyway, as I was saying. Wouldn't it be weird if humans lived like spiders? Like after fucking, she just turns around and kills us? I'd prefer that over the next six months of putting up with her bullshit, only for her to hurt you in every way possible. Like, fuck, just sink your fangs in and get it overly quickly, damn."

The crowd, and that guy, actually reacted to that rather well. People seemed to laugh most at subjects they could relate to.

"But even in the arachnid world, sometimes, it's rare, but sometimes the male can be slick enough to get away after the sex. Seriously, I'm not making that up. I watched a whole documentary about it, and then wondered what I was doing with my life that I had the kind of time to sit there watching a documentary about spiders fucking."

The guy in the back roared again, the others giggled ever so slightly.

"So I got thinking, is there like a spider-club where a bunch of these little guys sit around just shooting the shit about the one that always gets away? Like," He put on a ghetto voice, "'Hay you guyz know about Jimmy? shieeeeet, everybody know' bout Jimmy! He da' fastest spida' dere is. Ol' Jimmy fucked like, four spida' bitches in one day and he ALWAYS get' away! Hey look, dere he go again! Woohoo, Jimmaaahh! Get you suuum- OOp, Jimmy' dead," Richie frowned. "'Shouldn'a mess' wit dem black widows, mang.'"

The audience raved, but not as much as the mysterious man in the crowd with the annoying laugh. Best to end on a high note, leave 'em wanting more as they often do in the 'biz. That was also the night Richie had received an invitation to his first real Hollywood party, the manager gave him the address back stage and he was both

excited and left a tad bit dumbfounded.

"You fuckin' with me?" Rich asked as he took the paper.

"He watched your set and insisted I gave that to you," the manager said.

"BOB FUCKING SAGET?!" Richie yelled. "The guy from Full fuckin' House?"

"You haven't seen his stand-up, have you?" The manager grinned. "He's not exactly ... family friendly with his material."

I was made for Lovin' You' by Kiss played in his car as he drove around the dark downtown streets of L.A. looking for the house listed on the piece of paper he'd been given. Bob Saget, what the fuck was even going on anymore? After driving around and getting lost twice, he finally found the house. Not a big mansion party, but the place was packed, that was for sure. Took him twenty minutes just to find a place to park.

"Rich!" A man called from the across the room and crowd of people as Richie just walked in.. "Richie Tozier!" The small, sorta weaselly looking man hurried across the room and eagerly shook Richie's hand.

"I'm Steve Covall," he said. "I'm so glad you got my invitation!"

"I thought I was invited by uh..." It sounded stupid even saying it.

"Bob?" Steve smiled. "Yeah, we caught your set, it was great! He couldn't stop laughing!"

"Bob.. *Bob* 'couldn't stop laughing'" Richie asked. "Was he the one with that annoying fucking laugh that I called out on stage?"

"That's him!" Steve said eagerly. "You want to meet him?"

"Sure," Richie said. Why not? What was the worst that could happen? "Should I mention 'Full House,' or.."

"You could," Steve said as he led Richie through the room. There

were a lot of other comics there, a few of them Rich had known, others, he had no clue. "He might try to say you're kissing his ass if you do, though."

"Well," Richie began to quip. "Better to kiss his ass than suck his balls, right? Haha." Silence from Steve Covall. "Forget it, I'm kidding," he awkwardly laughed.

"Bob's this way."

"Alrighty."

Steve led Richie through the party, stopping every few seconds so people could say 'hi' and tell him he was funny. hilarious. hysterical. killed it on stage. Richie was still bad at responding to complimentary, it was new to him to have such appreciation for stuff that if he said anywhere other than the stage, would probably get his ass kicked. Offensive and crude humor was his specialty, though, and apparently had even gotten the attention of the guy from 'Full House.'

When he and Steve finally got into the little back room, Richie honestly hadn't known what he'd expect. He had such a vision of this guy making safe-for-tv family kind of humor. But apparently that wasn't the case at all. Of all the comics Richie had heard of or seen performed, he always ignored the likes of Mr. 'Danny Tanner,' figuring it would be dull. Boy, oh boy, was he wrong.

"Richie, may I present Mr. Saget," Steve said.

Bob was sitting on a little red leather love-seat with booze surrounding him, and when he saw Richie, he jumped out of his seat and shook his hand. Richie stood there a bit star struck, to say the least. He always got nervous when it came to meeting famous people. "Good to uh, meet you, Mr. Saget."

"Bob,' please," He told Richie. "I really enjoyed your set! You pull no punches, tell it as it is. I love how you can't tell if you're bullshittin' for comedy sake or if you're just telling shit that happened to you."

"Haha, thanks. Most the jokes I tell are either inspired by real events with a twist, or just shit that is funny to me and hopefully will be

funny to others, too."

"That's the way to do it! You're gonna make it, kid."

Richie didn't really like being called 'kid' but at this stage in his 'career' he wasn't about to complain.

"Yeah," Rich said. "When a joke lands it's the best. It's the hecklers that bug me," Richie sighed.

"We all get them. If you play it right, you can use a heckler to your advantage. Hey, you wanna know the secret to comedy, Kid?" Saget asked. Richie didn't even have time to answer. "Be your own worst critic. Deconstruct every joke you have, find the cracks and flaws in them, think of every possible angle a heckler could come at you with. Always have a comeback ready to naturally deflect them. There's no better way to win a crowd over than by ripping a heckler a new asshole. And when all else fails, just say fuck 'em! They're the ones paying to see you, so give 'em their money worth! Am I right, Steve?!"

"Nail on the head, Bobby!"

"Thanks," Richie nodded. "I'll remember that."

"Damn right you will," Bob smirked at him. "Because I want you to be my opening act for my upcoming tour."

"...Who.. wha..." Richie's jaw had literally dropped.

"Look at him, he's gonna wet himself!" Bob laughed. Richie gave a nervous chuckle. "No, look, I love what you did out there. You are one funny mother fucker!"

"Thanks," Rich said, and took a chance on something right then and there that could have either ruined his career, or been a huge hit. Make or break time. "I guess I am. Your mom is probably the best fuck I've had in ages."

Steve's eyes went wide in horror, and his words seemed to be heard by everyone else in the room, practically at the whole party.

Oh, shit.

And Bob stared at him for what felt like an eternity. Maybe that had been a mistake. But then to his amazement, Bob began laughing. That same loud, hyena-like laugh he'd heard in the theater.

"That's what I'm talking about, you sick mother fucker!" Bob patted him on the back. "Listen, do you have representation?"

"Like a manager?" Richie asked, somewhat startled by the question, still reeling from his crack about Bob's mother.

"N-"

"Drop'em if you do, Steve's your man now."

"Huh?"

Steve Covall rejoined the conversation, putting his hand on Rich's shoulder. "You're not going to make it in this business without a manager, Rich. And I'd like to bring you into the big times."

"Seriously?" Richie asked. As it stood, no, he didn't have a manager yet. In truth, no one had ever even offered. Richie had been a lone wolf who figured that while he was getting the laughs, he'd never make it big. Now that had changed, and never once as a kid when begrudgingly watching fuckin' Full House that one day, he'd be standing here, presented with an opportunity that would literally change his life.

"What do you say? You joinin' the band?" Bob asked and Richie, flabbergasted at this point, eagerly accepted.

"Yeah!" Richie exclaimed, but Bob looked a bit disappointed. A sort of 'you can do better than that' kind of look. Richie took the hint. "Fuckin' shit yeah, let's fuckin' rock this bitch!"

"That's what I'm talkin' about!" Bob and Steve took turns slapping Rich on the back so damn well near hard that he had to grab his glasses before they went flying off his head. But Bob ended up snagging them anyway.

"First things first," he tossed them to Steve. "Get the kid some better specs, those things look like they're held together by fuckin' paperclips."

"Tape and gorilla glue, actually," Rich said with a laugh, now blinded and squinting through the blur.

"We're going on tour next week. Get yourself some new material, nothing kills a career faster than the same old tired jokes. Do you do any other impressions?" Bob asked.

"Working on it," Richie said.

"Good, because your voices are really funny!"

Even though he could barely see, Rich saw a door of opportunity open up before him, and slipped into a voice he thought would win them both over.

"Hey, what do you mean I'm funny?" Richie asked in a voice that was unmistakably Joe Pesci. "What do you mean, you mean the way I talk? I'm funny how, I mean funny like I'm a clown, I amuse you? I make you laugh, I'm here to fuckin' amuse you? How am I funny?"

Bob stared in awe, it was probably the best Joe Pesci impression he'd ever heard and told him as such. "Do that on stage and you'll win the room, no shit!"

They spent the rest of the night drinking and bustin' each others balls with ridiculous jokes. Richie even tried some new material out and got some tips from Bob on what worked and what didn't. He signed with Bob Corvall the next day, and that's when things really took off.

They indeed went on tour together, and it was so surreal, standing on the largest stages he ever had as he opened for Bob Saget. Richie followed the advice he'd been given for his next few performances, and it surprisingly worked like fucking magic. Eventually he stopped relying solely on his voices and dropped the shtick of just making fun of himself, instead now, playing a sort of 'villain' on the stage.

"So," Richie said into the mic. "I recently discovered just how big of a fucking asshole I really am."

The crowd reacted with scattered laughter.

"No, get this," Richie continued. "My friend tried to set me up with this girl that, from first glance, was pretty good looking. Now, I always say looks don't matter to me because without these big coke-bottle glasses I'm honestly as blind as a fuckin' bat. Honestly like 9 out of ten times-" He stopped, considered, "seven out of ten times, it's true. Looks don't matter. And for what it was worth, this girl was fine enough. Plus, she had the biggest pair of balloons I've ever seen in my life. But my friend neglected to tell me just how bat-shit fuckin' psycho crazy this chick was. Stage 5 clinger, about an eleven out of ten on the psych-o-meter if you get my drift. I'm not kiddin, though, these tits were like, gigantic, like double-trouble, all you can eat titty buffet. Anyway... So, I get her back to my place after a disastrous date, she lets the twins out ... And the big-ass padded bra she was wearing reveals the biggest, or I should say, the most small-side-of-average disappointment of my life. Just like everything else in fucking Hollywood, they were fake as shit. So I start accusing her of false advertising and how that shit should be illegal... Long story short, I fucked her, but it was nothing to write home about."

The crowd hoo'd and holler'd in a mixture of laughter and boo's, but he only shrugged.

"So a week goes by and she apparently gets in touch with my friend and rants about how I went on a tirade about her having tiny fake-ass boobs. He calls me up all pissed off, going, 'What the fuck, Tozier! You said looks didn't matter to you!' To which I humbly reply, being a gentleman and all, 'Well, yeah! When I thought she had dem big ol' titties!'"

This time the audience laughed, some of them gasped, and there stood Richie, only smirking.

"What? I told you, I'm a fucking asshole," Richie smirked. "Am I wrong?"

Most of the crowd laughed, all except for one man that made the sound of what Richie thought was a cow taking a shit, of "boooo!" All at once and remembering Bob's advice of having a comeback for every possible angle a heckler could attack at, this prompted the

voice of Christopher Walken to respond from Richie's mouth, nonchalantly firing back;

"Baaahhooo...?' That sounds... t' meeh... like the noohise a woman makes... When Mistah dying coahw down thaaahre.. drahops his troousarhs. Cue Thuh Coahw bell!"

The impression was spot-on. Practice had indeed made perfect. The crowd didn't react at first, they all seemed amazed that it sounded as if Christopher Walken himself had taken over the mic and fired back for him. After the beat of silence, there were thunderous applause, only outweighed by the sincere laughter that filled the room.

The year went on like that and it was so great. When it finally ended, Rich looked forward to touring with Saget again, but Steve informed him that he brought a new opening act for every tour he did, and this one had been a hell of a ride, but it was now over. Steve assured him that it didn't mean anything though, as the opportunities were opening up for Rich everywhere, and he slowly was rising to megastardom, taking the place as one of Steve's favorite clients.

Richie had auditioned to be in Last Comic Standing season 6, but due to his material not being appropriate for TV, he lost out in favor to Jim Tavaré. Producers had warned him that if he told his jokes on TV the way he did on stage, the majority of his act would be 'nothing but multiple beeps.' Richie refused to change his act, and was not allowed to compete.

But that didn't stop him from succeeding elsewhere. Rather than beg club owners to let him perform now, they were the ones calling him. They all wanted 'that voices guy who had opened for Saget.' His phone rang by the hour and he had appearances booked on his calendar for months. His notoriety seemed to be exceeding him, he was even turning down bigger clubs because he was getting offers to appear on TV shows. He thought his bit on 'Late Night' was as big as he was every going to go, but that was until Steve managed to get him his own special on Comedy Central Presents. The thirty minute version that aired on cable had to be severely edited, but the uncut hour-long 'dirty' version was a huge hit. The CD and DVD sells alone were enough to bring in the bank he needed to get a new place, a nice little-big penthouse, and after all those years, he finally traded in

his old, tired car and was able to go to a real lot to purchase a brand new one.

Oh, and he did indeed visit The Record Parlour again on several occasions, this time paying the funny old man and rebuilding his album collection and then some. On one of his last visits, he noticed that old piece of paper he'd signed his then-worthless autograph on a few years back was now hanging on the wall, framed. Right next to all the greats. Rich smiled.

"Guess you made it, huh kid?"

"Yaaa," Rich said in one of his silly cartoon voices. "Dat's wight, wabbit."

"Then what are you still doing shopping here?"

"Nostalgia," Richie winked.

"Oh, fuck you," the man said in a humorous tone.

"Hahaha, fuck yooooouuuu!"

One day while cruising down Vermont Ave in his new red Mustang one afternoon, he came to a halt in usual heavy traffic flow and while Tom Petty's 'Even the Losers' played from his stereo, Richie looked to his right to see a face that was very fucking familiar looking back at him. Not directly at him, mind you. The face of this ominous looking man was on big blown-up gray-scale poster, hanging up in the window of Skylight Books. Right next to the Los Feliz theater, which he had been to before and had vaguely reminded him of a theater he went to as a kid, but he couldn't quite place what it had been called. Just like he couldn't truly recall why the face in the poster looked so eerily reminiscent.

It wasn't of a man he'd seen before, he didn't think so, at least. But the eyes, it was something about the his eyes. Richie had gotten lost for a minute and hadn't realized the traffic had started to move again, until the cars behind him began honking their hearts out.

"Alright, alright!" Richie flipped them the bird to the fellow road patrons and then hooked his right signal, pulling over to the curb and

shutting his car off. He got out and just stood outside of the store for what seemed like ten minutes, just looking at the poster and all the books on the shelf beside it. The man was an author, obviously, but something about him struck such a familiar cord with Rich.

"Have you read his work?" The voice of a stranger asked.

"What?" Richie jumped, seeing a young woman in glasses as thick as his own standing beside him now. "No."

Above the poster of the grim looking man was his name printed in huge font, 'BILL DENBROUGH.' He hadn't said the name aloud, but thinking it made some foggy memories come to the surface. Something about... Shark Puppy? What the hell.

"He's pretty good," the girl said. "Not my favorite, but for horror books he writes well enough."

"Oh, yeah?" Richie asked, his attention going back to the window.

"I mean, he has a tendency to ramble sometimes and drift away from the plot. If I was his editor I'd cut a good chunk out of most his work. But you know how writers do," the girl in the glasses giggled.

"I guess so," Richie said. In truth he'd never been much for reading, short of the biographies of his comedic idols. Then again, he was never the kind of person who would willingly wander into a library or bookstore, on purpose.

"Hey..." The girl trailed off, and Richie again looked over at her, noticing how she appeared to be studying him now. "Haven't I seen you somewhere?"

"Not unless you have a morbid sense of humor for crude and politically incorrect jokes," Richie grinned.

"Oh my god, you're him!" She suddenly shrieked.

Rich had to admit, it was still new and interesting if not even a bit surreal and off-putting to be recognized by fans. To even be able to say he was getting to the point where he had fans was baffling.

"Him,' I am," Richie extended his hand. "I'm R-"

"Rainn Wilson!" The girl practically leaped towards him. "I love you in 'The Office!'"

Goddamnit ...

Being a new celebrity had it's perks, but it also had it's downside. Being mistaken for other people, for example. This was the seventh fucking time Rich had been confused for that guy, but who was counting? To date he'd never even seen The fucking Office.

Then again, looking the girl over now, he couldn't see her as being part of the crowd that would willingly go to a Bob Saget show, where he'd gotten his start as an opening act. He hated breaking all the young fans hearts, so he decided to roll with it.

"Yeah," Rich said. "That's me, all right. Good to meet you," he said awkwardly. "I think I'm gonna give this Denbrough guy a shot," he said as he started to lean away from her and in a forward motion towards the Skylight.

"Wait!" She cried. "Would you take a picture? Or, sign something for me?"

He stopped and turned back towards her, putting on his big, phony smile. Who was he to deny a fan? Still, the last thing he needed was his image all over the girls' social media with the hashtag 'I met whatever the hell the guys' name is from 'The Office!'" "I don't do personal pictures when I'm, uh," he thought fast, and pointed to his head. "Having a bad hair day. But if you want something signed-" The girl pouted, but wasted no time pulling out a black Sharpie pen. "Yes please!" Richie took it and looked around for where he was supposed to put his signature. "What do you want me to uh-" The girl undid the top button of her blouse, squishing her exposed cleavage together and for the first time now, Richie noticed how stacked this girl was.

Yowza, boss.

"Would you?" She grinned.

"Why the hell not," He smiled back, biting the cap off the marker and

sloppily writing a name that either could have been Richie Tozier or Rainn Wilson. Good thing about autographs, they were always done hastily and looked like scribbled-shit. The old man at the record store had taught him that much.

"You write too damn neat, Mr. Richie Tozier," The man had said to him. "You need a signature."

He replaced the cap to the pen and handed it back to her, which she anxiously snatched away from him. "Ohmigod thank you! Thank you!" The poor misled girl shrieked again.

"Don't mention it. You have a good one, miss...?"

"Amber," she grinned at him, rather seductively.

"You have a good one, Amber." Rich said, and made his exit from the street, and from her, into the bookstore.

It occurred to him after entering the store that, had he been a total sack of manipulative, sociopathic shit, he probably could have gotten a quick BJ from her in the restroom. But, that would be wrong. He wasn't yet at the stage in his career where he could justify taking advantage of naive fans. Especially when they weren't even technically 'his' fans... Still, he was sure there was a bit in there somewhere that he could use on stage.

Richie made his way over to the shelf of books highlighted in the window, and from the back he found a couple others written by this Denbrough guy. 'Joanna,' 'The Dark,' 'Attic Room,' 'The Glowing,' and a book about werewolves that for some reason hit really close to home for Richie, even if, just like the author himself, Richie couldn't quite understand why. He picked them all up, including the newest edition, a 'best seller' according to the books' dust-jacket.

Inspecting the image closer now, he read the little biography about this Denbrough character that seemed to be repeated with slight variations on every one of the books, always with the same picture of him as well. 'BILL DENBROUGH is a New York Times bestselling horror novelist who started his terror inspired career with his books 'Joanna', 'The Dark' and the screenplay for 'The Attic Room'. Bill grew

up in Derry, Maine, USA and this is the place that inspired him. He now lives in England with his wife (actress and model) Audra Phillips.'

Richie pulled out his phone and did a quick google search of this Audra lady, audibly letting out a gasp of 'Daaayum,' in the oh-so quiet bookstore, drawing the attention of several patrons. He smiled and went back to his phone. The woman was stunning and with locks of natural red hair. She, like the author, reminded him of somebody else from his past, though he couldn't quite nail down just who those people were. Something about his memory had been hazy ever since moving to L.A. But the tidbit of information on Denbrough's dust-jacket about growing up in Maine, specifically a place called Derry seemed to give him goosebumps all down the back of his neck. Had that been where Richie once lived?

When he got his license, Rich had put down that he'd been born in Bangor, which according to Google Maps was pretty close to that Derry place. But it was the damndest thing, he just couldn't conjure up any memories of that little town called Derry. There was hardly any information of it online, either. Just that it had once been a beaver-trapping camp. Probably still is, Richie snickered to himself. 'Amirite boys?' He suddenly heard a younger version of himself say. Where the fuck had that come from?

All at once, Richie felt like he had to get out of there. Something made him feel as if he were going to be physically ill. He almost left without paying for the books, but quickly turned around and purchased them all.

"Big fan, huh?" The geeky kid behind the counter asked him.

"No," Richie spat, hurriedly. "Just thought it was about time I got my literature on."

"Interesting choice," the kid said. "Might I suggest-"

"No, I'm good, thanks, just ring it up."

The kid sighed and did so, and the books weren't cheap. They weren't very light, either. Richie quickly estimated that it would take him the

better part of a year just to get through these door-stoppers.

"Hey..." The kid tilted his head at Richie. "Aren't you-" "Yeah," Richie shot back bluntly. "Rainn Wilson. Glad you like the show."

"... Uh... Richie Tozier?" The geeky kid looked at him oddly. "What, is that a new joke you're working on or something?" Richie stared at the kid and blinked. Fucking hell. "You bet. Take it easy!"

Richie grabbed the bag of books which felt like weights to him and ran out of the bookstore, not even caring that he'd overpaid and left about fifty bucks worth of change in the kids hands. He got back out to his car and hopped in, taking off down the road and nearly causing several traffic accidents in the process.

"Bill Denbrough... Bill Denbrough... Where do I know that name?" He said to himself. It was on the tip of his tongue but he just couldn't quite connect the dots. "Fucking.. Shit!" He slammed his hands on the steering wheel. "Come on, Tozier, get a grip, man. Where do I know that fucking name!"

Denbrough... Derry.

It all had a certain ring to it, he just couldn't quite place it. The radio blared the tune of 'Let my love open the door' by Peter Townsend, but it wasn't the original version. It was the Philip Steir remix as far as Rich could tell. As he got back to the luxurious penthouse he'd began leasing just the month prior. He figured one day he might be famous enough, like all the other wealthy celebrities of Hollywood, to own one of those gigantic mansion. But for now, he was a starving artist and had to make due with what he got from local clubs. He was just glad to be headlining, finally. No more opening acts like some kind of

-

...Loser.

That's when it hit him. He parked his car and sat there for a moment, looking down at the bag of books in the passenger seat. Richie, almost subconsciously, tapped his horn twice.

Beep, Beep (Richie.)

God, that used to annoy him so much for some reason. People used to say that to him. Beep, Beep, Richie. Whatever the hell it meant... He didn't know.

Loser. He was a loser. Denbrough, he was a loser too. They were part of a bigger group of losers. Not too big, there were just a few of them. Seven of them, he vaguely recalled now. Lucky Seven. They were sort of a club.

'Yeah, Homeschool... Welcome to the Losers' Club,' Richie forced the verbalization out. What the fuck did that mean? Who was homeschooled? And why would a group of Derry willingly be part of something called 'The Losers' Club?'

Weird.

He tried to shake the feeling off as he got into his penthouse and made himself a drink. He dropped the bag on his counter and took out the first book. 'The Black Rapids.' He figured the stories didn't have to be read in any specific order or anything, might as well start with the most recent and work his way back to the beginning. Richie walked over to his stereo and turned it on, not even sure of what to play, so he just let it go to random. Making his way out to the back of his patio, he took a seat and set his drink down, firing up a cigarette as he held the book up and inspected it.

"'The Black Rapids,' ... Well hell, Big Bill, let's see what this is about-" He had only just sat it down in his lap when the words he'd spoke echoed in his mind. "'Big Bill?' .. Where the fuck did that come from..."

Richie opened then book and began reading. The story itself was written well, as far as he knew about writing, anyway. Except that the guy had a tendency to ramble. Just went the plot got going, he'd go off for what seemed like an eternity on details that seemed like a good editor may have told him to trash. He had to admit, he'd started skimming the pages. By the time he got to the end, he felt like he should write this Denbrough guy and ask for a refund. "Wow... That ending fucking sucked."

But he had noticed something, and some weird gut feeling told him

to dig into his other books one by one. Richie spent the better part of the night doing so, and had come to realize several patterns and formulas were reoccurring in Bill's books; They were always about the underdog, the outcasts, the freaks. Losers. Most of the books took place in small towns, always in Maine. And there was always some kind of horrible monster that the characters ended up facing, probably as a metaphor for something or other, Richie however never was much one for metaphors and tended to take everything at face value.

Something about each story struck him as very familiar, though. Certain keywords and phrases, locations like 'Rock war,' '29 Neibolt' or the 'Aladdin' theater - "Aladdin!" Richie exclaimed. That was the Los Feliz reminded him of, though he couldn't remember exactly why. It was as if his memory warehouse had been locked up good and tight and there was no breaking in. Also the one thing all his books had in common was it seemed like Denrough never knew how to end them properly. After rambling on way too long and pissing away all the energy of the big finale, the books just abruptly ending and for lack of a better word, they sucked balls.

Not realizing he had spent literal hours outside reading, Richie sighed of utter exhaustion and made his way back into his home. 'The Chain' by Fleetwood Mac was playing on his stereo then. He wasn't doing well at all that night, not at all. He was thankful that he didn't have a gig - until it occurred to him that he did. Looking at the clock, it was ten 'til curtain call and he was over thirty minutes away.

"Oh... SHIT ON ME!" Richie cried out just as his phone rang. He answered it in a panic, already figuring he knew who it was.

"Rich!" It was Steve.

"Hey! How's it going? How's your mother?"

"Funny. Where the fuck are you?!"

"Steve I am on my way there now, maybe five minutes away-" Richie lied. "Traffic, man."

"Yeah, well how's it look on me that the first night my new client is

headlining, he shows up late?!"

"Just stretch it!" Richie said. Show term - Make the opening act last longer.

"I'm gonna have to, but get your ass down here PRONTO or find a new agent!"

"Steve, I'm already there. Here. Whichever! Bye!"

Fuck. Shit. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Richie hurried himself to get ready, just throwing on a blazer over his jeans and t-shirt, which incidentally would become his signature wardrobe in the years to come. Happy accident, perhaps. He flew out of his house like a bat outta Hell and the half an hour drive it would have taken him to get there, he seemed to make in less than half the time. It was a miracle there had been no traffic accidents.

He rushed into the auditorium and only took minimal shit from Steve as his opener was finishing up his set. Rich had just enough time to down a glass of bourbon and wipe the sweat off his forehead with shaking hands, before his name was announced and he fled onto the stage, greeting the crowd. As the applause slowly died down, he launched into his act.

"So does anyone else in here ever have one night stands or am I just the coolest guy in the room? Yeah, I thought so," Richie smirked. "I recently got on this new dating app, do you guys use those?" The crowd clapped, and one girl in the room hollered a "woo!" at him. "Hey, I told you, you can't suck my dick until after the show," Richie chuckled.

"Dating apps are cool, except for the fact that you don't always meet who you are led to believe you will, right? That happen to anyone else? I met this one girl and I mean, her pictures were of her ... From like ten years ago, or maybe a couple hundred pounds ago. And like, because I'm not a total dick, I had to act like I was cool with that. Overall I was, I've pounded so many plus sized chicks I'm pretty sure I officially qualify as an unintentional chubby-chaser. Haha."

"So this chick leads me to her bedroom - her house was a mess, by the way. Getting there was like going through a maze. We finally get there twenty or so minutes later and she's trying to undress all seductively, which, eh. You know, I'm figuring, I'm already here and I didn't want to waste the Viagra. So she gets up on her bed and turns around lookin' back at me," Richie mimicked the very awkward movement on the stage, looking over his shoulder at the audience. "And she goes, 'I like it from behind-'" He did a female voice and winked before turning back. "And all at once, WHAM! The end legs of her bed fucking SNAP and she tumbles to ground all 'EEEE!' Which put me in a hell of an awkward position... Because, you know, I'm trying to stand there acting all concerned. But I'd be lying if I said it wasn't one of the funniest fucking things I've ever seen in my whole goddamn life."

The crowd seemed to dig it, there was nothing like getting the whole theater laughing, even if the spot-lights blinded him from truly seeing the audience. He preferred it that way, honestly.

"So we ended up going to her guest room to take care of business, and she got all pissed off that I insisted on using protection. Play safe, kids. Almost Immediately, I realized what was going on. Just like everyone else who moves to L.A., she was hoping to 'make it' as an actress or something and it just didn't pan out. So what else was left to do but get knocked up by a guy who had? No way that was happening, so after trying several different maneuvers to do the sex, I made damn well sure there was no way she could fish the condom out of her bathroom trash and leave me with some bastard child that I'd be paying support for. I went into the bathroom and got the brilliant idea to tie the condom in a knot before I threw it away. But the damn thing was so gooey that when I went to tie it off, WHAM! It shot out like a slingshot and all those little gunky mini-Richie's splattered on the mirror, on her counter, in her sink, fucking everywhere!"

The audience mainly laughed, seeing this visual of the scenario he had created and gasping, with a few of them letting out audible 'eww's' among the crowd.

"I know, right? And now here I am trying to clean all this shit off, with her yelling from the other room 'Riiichard what are you doooooin

in there?" He did her voice again. "Finally I just threw the condom in the toilet and flushed... Which, after doing so, I realized was another huge mistake. I didn't know some brands were more flushable than others! All at once the toilet started to overflow, and I'm getting the tank off, wiggling the little thing, trying to figure out how to fix this. Eventually I said fuck it and just threw some towels down, shut the light off and thanked her for the ... 'lovely' night. I bounced the fuck out of there and as I was getting in my car, I heard her scream from inside her house, 'Whaaaat the hell is this?! Ahhhhhhhhhh!' And I just sat in my car thinking, 'dammit, Rich. This is the third time in two weeks this shit's happened!'"

The crowd laughed and roared with applause, which was somewhat bewildering to him. None the less he smiled at his own joke and waved his hand at the crowd. After doing a bit more of his set, it was finally time to call it quits for the night. He'd given them their monies worth, and always made sure to leave them wanting more.

"Thank you," Richie said the majority of the crowd, then pointed out one heckler specifically - The one Joe Pesci's voice had gotten to take a shot at; "Fuck youuuu!" Then turned his attention back to the audience as the crowd laughed. "And until next time, I'm Richie Fuckin' Tozier!"

The AC/DC tune Rich had personally selected from his ever-growing list of records played as his outro as he got his first standing ovation. He remained on the stage to give a little wave and huge grin.

This is how 'Rich Records' was truly earned his name and reputation of the comedian known for doing crazy-good impressions and telling the most absurd, crude jokes and stories, and throwing some classic rock'n'roll into the mix. Richie Tozier had finally made it, and it could only get better from here. Right?

... Right?

Ridin' down the highway!

Goin' to a show!

Stop in all the by-ways!

Playin' rock'n'roll!

Gettin' robbed!
Gettin' stoned!
Gettin' beat-up!
Broken boned!
Gettin' had!
Gettin' took!

I tell you folks... It's harder than it looks!

It's a long way, to the top...
If you wanna rock'n'roll!
It's a long way, to the top...
If you wanna rock'n'roll!

4. Chapter 4: 'Rich Records' Drops the Mic

Rich 'Records' Tozier needed a powder.

Just one line, one little bump.

Just enough to give him that punch of energy that he was known for bringing out on stage. He thought he'd been doing pretty good for not touching the stuff since he and Sandy got married, but now his hands were shaking and he was out on stage, facing the crowd with his rapidly pacing heart. And he was regretting his refusal of that bump that had been offered to him backstage from his opening act, just moments before walking out into the spotlight.

The crowd roared and cheered as they always did. The tickets weren't cheap, and giving his audience the show they deserved was always high on his agenda. At least, it used to be. In the beginning of his career he didn't even need drugs to give him that zest of hyperactivity that he was known for having on stage. No, not even 'him,' not Richie Tozier, that old fuckin' Trashmouth. 'Rich Records,' the onstage persona he presented himself as to the public. A character in his own right, just like the others he created by means of impressions and voices. He didn't just tell jokes on stage; he created scenarios in which all the characters he'd come up with got involved and would play the situations out like scenes in a film. It got the audience involved, memorized in the act, waiting for the big punchline to each joke.

But he knew the truth in those lies. There was no goddamn punchline. Richie Tozier, he himself was the biggest joke of them all.

'Careful what you wish for,' the old saying goes. That and; *'Money can't buy happiness.'*

Two pieces of wisdom Richie had outright ignored, laughing them off as if they were jokes in and of themselves. He wished for fame, to be like the greats, the guys he spent his youthful years idolizing... and he got it. Richie had become one of them, getting the laughs and applause he begged for and being invited out to all the Hollywood parties. With the fame, of course, came the fortune. Being a poor kid

from Maine, Richie found himself drunk on success long before he ever even went near the actual bottle. He splurged on expensive, custom-designer clothes and material things that he had no purpose buying. He bought them simply because he could, things that were just so... not Richie Tozier. The cars, furniture, some stuff he bought just to buy and show off he had the money in his name to do so. When as a kid, He never thought he'd see a thousand dollars in real life, now he was squandering five-K here, ten-G there, always on things that he didn't even think twice about, nor did he give two fucks for to have. Looking around his luxurious playboy penthouse, he felt like a stranger in his own home. Hell, he barely recognized himself in his own reflection anymore.

Richie Tozier was on a high, eventually becoming the great 'Rich Records,' the funny voices guy; the 'Thank you, Fuck you, and Until next time' guy. But it wasn't him. It just wasn't him anymore. He no longer felt at home on the stage as he once did, in fact his anxiety was often doing all the work for him, he let his characters take the lead as he himself tended to be on auto-pilot.

"So, my girlfriend caught me masturbating to her friends' Facebook page," Richie said into the microphone. The crowd giggled. "And now I'm in masturbaters anonymous. I stand up at the first meeting and I say, 'My name is Richie Tozier, and I am an addict.' Afterwards it occurred to me that this was supposed to be anonymous. It only got even more awkward when I saw the friend in the same meeting who I'd been masturbating to. I point at her and go," he switched to a Shaggy voice from Scooby-Doo, "*Zoinks, man! heh... you're like, totally the reason why I'm here!*" Richie screeched in the raspy voice.

The crowd lost it. If only they'd known that like with most comedians, his jokes were just a comedic twist on true events.

Richie Tozier would in fact go to rehab, but not for sexual addiction. Over the years he would develop a taste for coke, and not the soda. Starting small at first, being invited to the elaborate Hollywood parties that other comedians and celebrities would often frequent in the after hours. Sure, he'd have an over-priced beer when offered by the bartender, which was on the house to him for being invited over as a talent. Then the harder liquor came, whiskey, bourbon, a shot of tequila here and there. Why not? It was a party.

Feeling the buzz coming on, he would excuse himself from telling jokes and doing voices to get a breath of fresh air out on the balcony, where the smokers lounged. Sure, he'd take a cigarette when it was offered to him; why not? It was just one cigarette, and then it was just one pack. It eased the stress of having to constantly perform, just like alcohol took the edge off. And then it was marijuana. Why not? His lungs had already gotten accustomed to breathing in smoke from the cigarettes, and although weed had a different odor to it, it was all basically the same. Where his preferred brand of Winston's took the stress off, the party favor grass made him feel light-headed and calm, tired even. Also, made him crave Taco Bell like nothing else in this world.

So here was Richie in the early 2000's, chain-smoking cigarettes, taking shots and drinking the good, hard, expensive stuff, and riding his slow highs out from the pot. Soon he began just buying it all on his own, no longer thinking of it as social or party favors. And the crazy part is, it worked, it all did help him function on stage. Maybe not so much the weed, as he went through a period where his jokes and performance were criticized for being low-energy and a whole hour about food. Though his joke about the Scooby-gang all being a bunch of stoned hippies who only THOUGHT they were going around solving mysteries seemed to always get a pretty good laugh, which is why he still incorporated the Shaggy voice into his current act. It was nostalgia at that point. Most the time he just seemed to hurry through his set, not even thinking about the jokes anymore. The only lingering thought on his mind was doing his time so he could get back stage and get his next fix. His next smoke, his next drink. Fuck the fans, this was about him and his needs. They should have been grateful for the time he spent entertaining them.

The fame only took him so far, it got his foot in the door for the parties and the fortune merely paid his way to getting everything he could find. He drew the line at injecting himself with anything, even Richie had his limits. And a decade ago he surely never would have even entertained the notion of putting anything up his nose. But he could never say no to showing up to a party, never say no to an offer one of his old timey idols threw out to him. So instead of saying 'no,' Richie Tozier found himself saying, 'why not?' And this began his addiction to cocaine. In a way it was like steroids for comedians, it

gave them just the right amount of zest they needed to get out on that stage and treat their comedy with high energy. Richie's shows were compared to Rock n' Roll concerts and he felt as if he could fly. There was no stopping him.

And then there was Sandy.

"All I'm saying," Steve continued as he led Richie through the party. "Is. your material has taken kind of a dark turn here and there. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to have some of our people write a few bits for you. We have some good writers on our staff, Rich!" "I'm not telling other people's jokes," Richie scoffed at him. "That's like, the comedian's code, man. You write your own set. You go out, live life, and put a comedic twist on it. Almost any situation can be made into a joke-"

Richie stopped talking when he laid his eyes on her for the first time.

Cassandra Wirt was an acquaintance of Steve Covall, Richie's talent agent. She worked as a secretary for the law firm associated with the agency. Of course being a secretary was not what she spent four years in college studying law for, but as she had said, 'you gotta start somewhere.' And it was true. Richie had spent much of his last years trying to bury the memories of when he was a mere opener and performing at bars and clubs in the Valley of Hollywood.

Meeting Sandy was a game changer for Rich, she was drop dead gorgeous from first looks. He'd never believed love at first sight until all four of his eyes were laid upon her. Mermaid length flowing dirty-blonde hair, only slightly tanned and with the right amount of cute little freckles that sprinkled her face. She was wearing a business suit, fresh from work the first night he met her at the party, standing outside on the balcony with her hair down and the first few buttons of her blouse casually undone. She was smoking a Parliament, casually leaning over the railing and looking down at the gigantic shimmering pool beneath them. Usually there was a crowd outside, but not tonight.

Steve Covall brought Richie outside to meet her, leading him away from the music of Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets" playing from inside the mansion (it wasn't played from an iPod, either. Elton

himself was sitting at the piano, treating his guests to a classic tune.) But at that moment, Richie hadn't even been fazed by the artist just in the other room, he'd drowned out every word his manager spoke to him, except of course, when he introduced the woman outside.

"Rich Tozier, may I present Cassandra Wirt," Steve said.

"Sandy,' please," she said exhaling a cloud of smoke into the air and exchanging her cigarette to her left hand, so she could extend her right for Richie to shake. "Cassandra sounds so formal, I thought these were our off-hours, Steve?"

Richie took her hand, but did not shake it. Instead, he felt his fingers go numb with tingles as he reached down and kissed it. But he said nothing.

"Cat got your tongue?" She teased, then looked at Steve. "I thought you said this was the one that never stops running his mouth?" Sandy giggled to Steve. "Come on, you can't look at me like that and not say anything."

Steve jabbed Rich with his elbow.

"Sorry. I .. sorry. I'm Tozier. Rich. Richie- Sorry." He mumbled. Sandy took her hand back and grinned, daringly.

"So, Mr. Tozier, is this business or pleasure?"

"*What's the fun of business without a little pleasure?*" He quipped. Words that would come back to haunt him.

"I like the way you think," Sandy said.

Okay, so maybe it had been lust at first sight instead of love. But the two of them ended up spending the whole night talking and then went back to his place to do a little partying in private and to talk about the difference between Maoism and Trotskyism, so to speak. Richie Tozier had fallen, and boy oh boy, did he fall hard. She was his first real romance after a few awkward shambles with some women which had turned out to be nothing more than one night stands. With Sandy, it wasn't just sex. He felt as if he were making love for the first actual time in his life. She would always fall asleep

in his arms, and this continued for two years.

"Hey, wanna go to Vegas and get married?" He had asked her spontaneously one night.

"..What?" Sandy asked. "Are you being serious right now or is this another joke? You really want to get married? "

"*Why not?*" Richie said with a smile.

And so that's what they did. When he was around her, he felt as if nothing else mattered in the world. This, here, now, this was what life was truly about. This was the meaning of pure happiness, that he knew was bound to last forever.

At first.

They had decided to legalize their relationship, and sometimes Richie thought that's where all their real problems truly began. It stopped being a partnership and at that point, barely even resembled anything like a relationship. No relationship is walking on sunshine 24/7, and they had their problems just like everybody else. Little things at first, her snarky comments that he fought back with his own sarcasm, nothing they couldn't just laugh about later on. But she began trying to change him, suggesting he trade his old specs in for contacts (which he hated) and picking out what wardrobe he should wear.

"No more Hawaiian shirts," she said. "Are you a child, or a fucking man?"

"Maybe I'm a professional man-child," he smirked. She did not find that at all humorous.

"Yeah," she said back to him, dryly. "Sometimes I think you are. You're really not as funny as you seem to think you are sometimes, Rich."

That hurt. Of all the things she had said to him leading up to this moment, and even some of the things she'd say to him in the future, that comment stuck with him the most.

Eventually, everything became about her. Sure, he couldn't argue that she deserved to be happy and should still pursue a career, which led him to get a vasectomy so some little Tozier bastard wouldn't ruin her chances. But after two years, Sandy had become the bane of his existence. Depression slowly crept in, and more and more he saw the big loser she made him out to be.

So, he sought comfort elsewhere. He began going to parties alone instead of inviting her to come with him, drinking his sorrows away and picking his old habit back up. The drugs took the edge off, they made him not feel like the big piece of untalented shit that she constantly assured him he was. It didn't help that one night when he was coked out and took to the stage, he decided to share one of their more personal moments with the crowd.

"You guys know what a 'cuckold' is?" Richie had asked into the microphone. "It's when someone gets off on seeing their wife getting fucked by someone else. This is a thing, legit, it's a fetish. And as it turns out, I do not share the views as the guys who thrive for this little act of adultery..."

Richie let the laughter die down, staring into the abyss of darkness of the crowd. "My wife has been fucking around on me. It was a dirty little secret at first, but then the other night I walked in on it. Some guy, don't know him, he still mostly had his business suit on, though. Fucking my wife in our home, our bed." Something was different about his tone that night. While he usually couldn't help but to awkwardly smile and even chuckle at his own jokes, Richie more looked like he was a broken man on the verge of tears.

"Of course she tried to write it off as, 'oh, this is the first time it's ever happened,'" Richie said in a squawking voice that mimicked Sandy's. "And 'he doesn't mean anything to me. He just works for my boss, this is how I get a heads up in the game. It's social politics, blah blah blah, babble babble babble.'" Everyone laughed at the bit, but it wasn't a joke. And Sandy did not find the incident funny.

"This is our life, Rich!" She'd screamed at him. "Not some joke you just take to the stage and tell a bunch of strangers!"

Why he still bothered to stay with her by then was a joke all in and

of itself. His wife, the emotionally abusive cheating whore who was fucking her way through life. Fucking everybody but him, by this point. It had been months since she even touched him or allowed herself to fall asleep in his arms. Despite being so close in their bed, she might as well had been miles apart from him by then.

"Isn't it, though?" Richie asked after rising up from snorting another line of coke. She had her fun, he had his. Richie turned around and put his stereo on, hoping the noise would drown out the sounds of their argument from anyone within earshot. The last thing he needed was to be a cover-story for TMZ again. 'Gimme Shelter' by The Rolling Stones began blaring in the house.

"Look at you," Sandy shouted at him. "Snort it up, you fucking coke-head."

"Hey, fuck off. I quit," Richie said. "I quit for the longest time because I didn't need this shit. All I needed was you, this, our life together. Until you decided I wasn't enough for you and had to start fucking everyone at your goddamn office!"

"Once!" Sandy shouted back. "I fucked one other man, once!"

"Yeah, bullshit. You think I didn't know about all your little late nights at the office? All those little giggles while you sat there texting people, thinking I wasn't paying attention? Flirting with people the way you used to flirt with me? You're a fucking manipulative slut who just uses sex as a weapon to crawl up the ladder of life, Sandy. Good for fucking you."

("What's the fun of business without a little pleasure?" He had quipped the night they met. And now here he stood, those words coming back to haunt him)

"Well at least I'm happy!" Sandy shouted back.

"Oh, well, I guess that justifies it, then." Richie poured himself a glass of expensive bourbon and downed it, bottoms up.

"You don't even pay attention to me anymore, everything is always about you, you, you!"

Richie literally spit a mouthful of Van Winkle's all over the floor and gave a good, hearty laugh.

"Always about 'me!?' Oh, fuck me runnin', sometimes I think you should be the comedian! I've given up SO much for you, Sandy. I stopped smoking when you did, I don't drink anymore, I haven't used drugs during the whole course of our marriage! I let you take my life and completely shape it how you wanted. Take a look around!" Richie held out his arms and did a little spin. "This is AAAALLLLLLLLLLLLLLL FOR YOU! Wow, I guess I really AM a selfish fuckin' prick," he took another drink and began shaking his head. "This isn't a marriage. This isn't even a fucking relationship anymore."

"It hasn't been for a long time, Rich," Sandy sheepishly admitted. "...I... I'm not even certain it ever really was."

The truck hit him at 95 MPH, head on. Metaphorically speaking, though in that moment, he would have rather been plowed down by an actual truck. A semi. Let it obliterate his body into a million pieces like his heart had just been by her fierce words.

"Run that by me again?" Richie asked, blinking so intensely his left contact lens nearly popped out of his eye socket.

"Look," Sandy said, softly reaching out for his hands but he pulled away from her.

"No."

"You were the hottest act back then," Sandy said with tears beginning to form in her eyes. "The rising star. I never intended it to go as far as it did."

"So... Wait wait wait, are you telling me that you only got with me in the first place is because I was the flavor of the fucking week?" Richie asked, and somehow through the hysterics, began laughing. "Are you fucking kidding me right now?!"

"Come on, like you didn't get off on that?" Sandy asked. "Mr. Rich 'Records.' Try and tell me you didn't enjoy that ride, having all those women fuck you just because you were famous. You'd be lying if you

tried."

"Yeah. I did," Richie said. "I did until I realize how fake it was. Until I met you. You were the first real person I ever loved!"

"It was lust, Richard," God, he hated when she called him 'Richard.'
"It was never love."

"You don't mean that," Richie gasped.

"Yeah," Sandy nodded. "Richard, I do. Have a good one."

And that was the end of that chapter of his life. Just like that, Sandy packed up her shit and got outta dodge. Left him standing there, alone... as Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets" began playing from his stereo. Oh, the irony of that.

Richie viciously flipped off the door she'd walked out of, at the life she chose to leave, and yelled loudly enough that he hoped she heard him; "Say 'hi' to your mom for me!"

Then he walked back over to his desk and did some more blow. Fuck her.

Years later he found out she had successfully fucked herself into a new marriage and a position as one of the most wealthy lawyers in the Washington law firm. 'Good for her,' Richie thought as he was knee-deep in his drug habit by then. He didn't go near the other stuff anymore. Richie had become a complete addict, and it wasn't even helping his performances anymore. Now it was just something to do, a way of life, a bump before getting out of bed each morning. He couldn't function without it properly anymore. He couldn't present himself on stage. His life went into one hell of a downward spiral.

Eventually he found himself checking into rehab to get the shit out of his system once and for all. It was a struggle, but it had worked and a year later he was clean and ready to get back out on that stage. Making jokes about going to rehab, albeit for having a masturbating addiction over a drug habit. Before his routine took a rather dark turn.

"So, I started wearing glasses again," Richie said to the crowd. "As a

kid they drove me bug shit, but contacts were even worse. I never wanted those damn things. I was married, as some of you know," the crowd clapped, he waved them off. "No, take it from me, you're better off dead, than wed. Seriously, it may have been bliss for awhile but it turned out to be my worst fucking nightmare. Mistakes are scarier than monsters-" Richie burst into laughter over his own joke, but in truth he was holding back the urge to just fucking cry or vomit. Probably a little of both.

"I did so much to make her happy, changed so many things about myself... But it wasn't enough. It was never enough." He trailed off, only looking up when the crowd began laughing and cheering.

"That... wasn't a joke. I .." The crowd drowned him out in more laughter. He looked around the room anxiously. "I .. I'm so fucking alone. I just..." The words couldn't come out of his mouth anymore. He was a lost soul. And through all of this, the crowd just laughed as if it was the funniest thing he'd told yet. This was just a new character, the lonely, depressed guy. Hardy har har fucking har.

"..Well, thank you, fuck you and until next time," Richie said in a cracking voice and fumbled to get the microphone reconnected to the stand, instead it slipped from his shaking hands and it fell to the ground, bouncing and rolling away from him. And the audience raved, they applauded, he even got a standing ovation.

What the fuck was his life anymore?

He was done, out, he decided to was going to quit the business once and for all. Of course, Steve told him how stupid of an idea that was and refused to let him do it.

"This is Hollywood, Rich! The people love you, they want more, more, more!"

"More..." Richie had scoffed. "Everyone ALWAYS wants more, Steve! When is it going to be enough, huh?"

"Never," Steve said bluntly. "Not until your the tragic tale of Rich Records comes to a full stop and just like all those other comedians you die of an O.D. or something. You're still young!"

"I'm thirty-eight..."

"Thirty-eight is the new twenty, buddy! Come on..." Steve said, taking a seat on the couch next to him... and inching his way uncomfortably closer to him by the second. "You're my favorite client, Rich. What can I do to make this better?" Steve had gotten right up next to Rich. Too close for comfort, to be honest. It got even more uncomfortable when Steve reached over... and put his hand on Richie's knee. "I'll do anything to keep you happy, Rich. Just name it. What do you want?"

Richie faked a smile, took Steve's hand, and swiped it away from his knee. "Not that."

"Alright, alright," Steve put his hands up defensively. "You can't blame me for trying, right?"

"Ha. Do all your other clients get such extravagant offers?"

"Look, this never happened, okay?" Steve got off the couch and walked across the room, grabbing something from his desk and extending his out to him.

"What's this?" Richie asked as he lit a cigarette and tilted his head to the side.

"Backstage passes to this new guy, we just started representing him a few months ago. He's hilarious, Rich."

"I prefer the classics," Richie waved him off.

"Give something new a chance. Take the night off. Relax a bit! Go enjoy some fresh material. Look, his name is Chris Shank, he IDOLIZES you! It would mean the world to him if you came to his show tonight. Don't you remember when you started out?"

"Been trying to forget, actually."

"Back when you got to go see all your favorite comedians perform," Steve continued. "Check this kid out, do him a favor."

"ALRIGHT, alright, fuck's sake, I'll go. How about you do me a little favor first?" Rich asked. "Got any snow?"

Richie had gotten his fix, which would suffice for the next hour or so as he sat front row at this kid's first show as a headliner. Of course, he showed up late and bumped into a dozen people as he was taken to his seat. Immediately he ordered a Bourbon as he looked up at this kid. He was tall and lanky, which made Richie think of him as 'Lanky Shanky,' and he found that more humorous than anything in his act at all. But half way through it, Richie stopped laughing. While the crowd chattered and giggled around him, Richie found himself glaring up at this sack of shit, who was telling a joke that sounded just a tad bit too familiar...

"So," Chris Shank continued. "Last night I walked in on my girl getting fucked by some other guy. What a slut, right?! And this guy, fucking my girl in our home, our fucking bed, he still has his damn business suit on! Like, what, my girl isn't even good enough to fuck naked? Hahaha, eat dicks! So, like, I get home and I see this dude fucking my girl, and I'm standin' there like, 'what is this, do you think I'm some kind of cuck or something?! hahaha. A Cuck, by the way, for those of you who don't know, is when some pitiful sack of shit gets off seeing their wife getting fucked by somebody else, like, what the fuck, right!? This shit is like a legit fetish, what the fuck?! Well as it turns out, homey don't play that shit, you know what I'm sayin'!? Hahahha. So, my girl, it turns out she's been fuckin' around for awhile like it was some dirty little secret. But I knew. Of course I knew, like I know my own jizz okay, and I saw some stains on the sheets that weren't mine, hahaha. Yeah, right? She tried to pull that shit on me of all, 'this is the first time it's ever happened!' And 'he doesn't mean a thing to me. It's social politics or whatever, you know? this is how I get up in the game, and blah blah blah blah! Yeah, let me tell you something, alright? Fuck you too, hahaha. Oh! But then! But then she gets pissed at me when she catches me masturbating to pictures of her friends' Twitter! Telling me I need to go to masturbaters anonymous or some shit. Bitch, how about you go to cheating-bitches anonymous! Right?! Hahaha."

Richie sat there completely appalled, livid, full of rage. Had this little shit literally just ripped off his joke? Had it been some bullshit he'd just made up for a quick laugh, that would have been one thing. But this guy took something very personal Richie had said on stage in a moment of despair, and completely fucking lifted it for his own

benefit.

Fuck this.

Richie got up from the table and about knocked it over as he rushed out of the room, leaving the room to enjoy the rest of the set this Chris Shank had probably stolen from others. Rich got himself out to the alley and slammed his face against the brick wall, nearly snapping his glasses in two.

"Fuck.. FUCK!" Richie muttered under his breath, slamming his fists into the wall as well, before kneeling over to vomit. He hadn't felt this sick for a long time.

The door beside him opened and out came that little weasel of a manager, Steve Covall.

"Whoa, Rich! Are you okay?"

"What the FUCK was that in there, Steve?!" Richie pulled the bastard to him by his tie and pushed him against the wall.

"Whoa whoa, what are you talking about, Rich?! Hands off the suit, okay? This is an Armani!"

"What am I talking about? Your new little talent in there ripped off my set!"

"What?" Steve asked. "No he didn't..."

"Steve, open up your fucking ears! It was my act! Almost word for word!"

"Hey... ease up okay? This is probably just a big misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding? He broke the code! Comedians do NOT do others' jokes! And when I told it, it wasn't even a goddamn joke! That shit really happened to me!"

"Whoa, Sandy actually cheated on you?" Steve asked. "I thought that was just part of your act..."

"Yeah," Richie spat. "Just like everyone else. Nothing on stage is real. It's always about the ha-ha's right?"

"Okay," Steve said, and that really annoyed Richie. He fucking hated it when people had nothing better to respond with than a simplified 'okay.' Imbecilic asshole. "But didn't you divorce for irreconcilable differences?"

"... Because she was fucking around, Steve! I'd call that pretty fucking irreconcilable."

"Okay, okay, breathe, buddy..." Steve said easily. "Look, think of it as like, an homage, okay?"

"Oh 'homage' my ASS! It's theft, is what the fuck it is. Plain and fuckin' simply. Shank is an unoriginal, talentless piece of shit."

"Well hey, at least he changed it enough to make it his own, right?"

Rich glared at his manager, and before he could speak again, he turned and vomited once more. Steve gave him a hearty pat on the back.

"There you go, buddy, let it out. Look, do you need some more coke?"

Richie couldn't honestly believe it. After years of all his work, all his effort, all the time he spent crafting his gift into routine after routine, just so a little shit like this could come in and take it out from under him. He was done, he was just so done. Enough was finally enough.

He shooed Steve away, "Go blow it on your new talent. I'm not the flavor of the week anymore, right?"

Richie turned and staggered down the alley, hoping to just get to his car and drive home so he could sleep the rest of this off. He fished a Winston out of his pocket and gave it a light, leaving a trail of blue smoke in the cold air behind him.

"Alright," Steve called back. "Well hey, you just got home and get a good nights sleep, okay buddy? I'll talk to Shank, work this out. You take care, Rich!"

"Yeah," Richie snapped sarcastically.

His life was the joke. It didn't have a punchline. He understood that now. 'Rich Records' was the bit. All of this was just so fucking phony, and he had finally hit the lowest point of his career. 'Careful what you wish for,' he thought in his head and then chuckled. Just like his idols, he had done the drugs, gone through a horrible marriage, go on to do a stint in rehab, and now, here he was, having his jokes ripped off by Hollywood's new talent. Go fucking figure.

He got in his Mustang and sped off into the night, cranking the radio up to find a Neil Young tune keep him company as he made the lonely drive back to his big, empty house. Almost as empty as he was now. Soon enough it would be filled with tons of junk he never wanted in the first place, just like most rich people tend to do. He was one of them. Just another fucking phony, and he knew it. He caught a glimpse of his eyes in the reflection of his rear-view mirror, and then looked away. The very sight of himself made him so fucking sick.

Old man, take a look at my life, I'm a lot like you...

I need someone to love me the whole day through...

Ah, one look in my eyes And you can tell that's true...

Old man, take a look at my life, I'm a lot like you were...

Richie Tozier went on a binge that weekend, drinking, drugs, the works. Anything to make the sorrows of his life subside for just a few minutes at a time. By all rights he should have been dead, but fate, it seemed had other plans in store for Richie.

First thing on Monday morning, Richie awoke face down on his mess of a bed, hanging off the corner and still wearing his favorite red Cashmere robe on from the night before. His phone had been ringing for who knew how long, which had been easily enough to ignore, but the banging at his door was harder. Groaning, Richie forced himself to roll out of bed and grab his glasses. Each knock sounded like it was going to cause his head to explode with throbbing pain.

"Okay, okay... Fuck me, I'm coming..." Richie said lowly as he inched his way to the door.

He finally managed to undo all the latches, and saw Steve there, pacing back and forth and in a pool of sweat.

"Yowza, boss, what the fuck happened to you?" Richie asked, unenthusiastically. "It's Shank," Steve pushed past him and made his way into the house.

Richie wasn't awake enough for this shit, and the hangover was really hitting him now. "Ughh..." He swung the door closed and walked over to the bar beside his kitchen, making himself some breakfast, which was to say a Winston that was lit first and then a tall glass of Bourbon. Breakfast of champions.

"Really, Rich?" Steve asked. "It's not enough noon yet!"

"It's noon somewhere, so quit your bitchin'," Richie gulped the drink and took a drag off his cigarette. "So? What's with Shank, who'd he rip off this time?"

"This really isn't funny, Rich."

"I've learned that most everything in life is funny, even if in a morbid ironic sense."

"He's dead... Rich."

Richie gulped the rest of his drink down, hard. "Come again?"

"Chris Shank. He's dead!"

Richie fell onto the stool beside him, letting this information soak in for a minute.

"I didn't do it," he said at last.

"Hilarious, Rich. Really. Fucking hysterical. You should tell that one on stage."

"How'd it happen?"

"Guess you haven't been paying attention to the buzz..."

"Do I ever?"

"Well, he got outed. His entire act was ripped off of other comedians, and he got called out on it. Look -"

Steve pulled out his phone and held it up to Richie, who squinted at it. TMZ, go figure. They'd made a compilation of Chris Shank's set pieces, all recorded poorly from shaky phones. After he told a joke, it cut to more professionally recorded footage of other comedians, telling the exact same joke. Funny enough, Richie wasn't among the comedians listed that he'd stolen from. Go figure.

"Huh," Richie said, sliding the phone back over to him. "And?"

"He threw himself from a balcony last night... They had to scrape him up with a shovel, Rich."

"Sheesh..." Richie shuddered, and then poured himself another drink.

He felt bad, he did. Sure, he'd been plenty pissed at the kid for ripping him off, but not to the point where he had wished death on him or anything. Everyone makes mistakes and it's a much better pay off when they live to regret it and learn their lesson.

"Guess this life isn't cut out for everybody."

"Yeah," Steve said, pulling the drink away from Richie and setting it aside.

"So, where do we go from here?" Richie asked.

"Well, Chris was supposed to headline tonight... I need you to cover it, Rich."

"You want me to stand in for the guy who ripped me off? Ha, there's a joke in there somewhere, even through this tragedy."

"Get yourself cleaned up, buddy," Steve said, swiping his phone back and heading for the door. "You're on at 10 PM, sharp."

"Hey," Richie called out. Steve stopped in his tracks and turned back. What was he supposed to say? His jokes were old, stale, just a bunch

of voices he'd done a million times and the same tired material as always. No way he could come up with something new in a matter of hours. He nearly stuttered to get the words out, but finally they came as a spat. "Remember two years ago, the night I met Sandy?"

"Yeah?"

"You'd been telling me you have a really good writing staff."

Just like that. Richie made a deal with the devil. Fuck it, right? What was the point of working endless hours on original comedy if there was every chance there'd be another Chris Shank to come along and rip the material off? At least this way, Richie couldn't feel so stung by it.

"I'll send some of their work your way, see what you can make of it," Steve said before he left. Richie nodded and remained seated in his kitchen, looking at the glass of Bourbon in front of him, and bracing the fact that from here on out, he'd be telling jokes hand-crafted for him by other people. He was already a big phony, anyway.

So, fuck it, he thought. And then those two familiar words came to mind; *Why not?*

Richie went out on stage that night, clean and sober, but ecstatic as ever and greeted the crowd with a big, phony, 'Rich Records' smile. "Hey, everybody. Settle down. The fun is just beginning..."

*Psychic spies from China try to steal your mind's elation
And little girls from Sweden dream of silver screen quotation
And if you want these kind of dreams
It's Californication...*

*It's the edge of the world and all of western civilization
The sun may rise in the East
at least it's settled in a final location
It's understood that Hollywood sells Californication...*

*Pay your surgeon very well to break the spell of aging
Celebrity skin is this your chin or is that war you're waging?
Firstborn, unicorn, Hardcore soft porn*

Dream of Californication
Dream of Californication...

5. Chapter 5: Richie Parties Too Hard

All was fairly quiet in Hollywood that night.

That was, until The Edgar Winter Group's 'Frankenstein' suddenly roared through Richie Tozier's penthouse as maximum volume, just about loud enough to shatter his windows and the lenses in his glasses. But as the saying went, 'if it's too loud, you're too old,' and Rich hadn't quite hit that point yet. Bring on the ringing in his ears, he'd rock till he went deaf or his heart gave out. Which at this point, the latter was probably going to strike first.

"FFFFFFuuuck!" Richie yelped in absolute pleasure as he rose up from the desk, where he had just inhaled four thick lines of pure cocaine, each with loud snorts from his right nostril, now burning red with delightful soreness. The drugs soared straight up to his brain as he rubbed his nose, making sure not a spec had been wasted.

He had been legally single again for about a week, after two years of what turned out to be nothing but another lie, and had been livin' it up (L-I-V-I-N') on a bender of drugs, alcohol, and rock'n'roll since last Tuesday. Or, was it, Wednesday? Fuck it, he would just consider it Friday and use it as another excuse to party some more. Everyone coped with loss in their own way, and maybe five years ago, Richie Tozier would have just been found sobbing in bed until he had no tears left to spill. But this was Rich Records, baby! And Rich Records drowned his sorrows with partying.

"You're still not hard..." A mousy voice called out from under the desk, prompting Richie to give a high-pitched yelp again, this time startled as all Hell.

"Oh SHHHIIIT-!" Richie exclaimed, sniffing some more and wiping his nose, honestly throwing his hands up in defense. "...I forgot you were down there."

Richie scooted back in his chair and from beneath the desk and his favorite red Cashmere robe, the young girl appeared. She wasn't too young, mid-twenties or so, just young by comparison in his ripe old age now. She'd approached him at a little shindig earlier that night,

some kind of celebrity-groupie of sorts. Said she was 'ready to party,' so they hopped in his Mustang and had spent the last few hours partying it up.

That all seemed like a blur to him now, he'd been with someone new each night over the week. No one he'd call special, just someone to spend a little quality time with and hopefully ease his pain and loneliness. They were all a dime a dozen, but of course he wouldn't mention that fact. Or, that he'd already forgotten this one's name. Had he even asked? He wasn't so sure of anything anymore.

"Having fun down there?" Richie asked, looking down at her with a grin.

"Yea!" She called out to him, her voice seemed to echo as if she were down a dark tunnel. "I can't believe I'm suckin' off Rich Records!" The girl giggled.

"You think das' somethin'?" Richie said, in the thick accent of Andrew Dice Clay. "You shud' take'a look back thah at whatchar' motha's doin' to mah' aaaasshole! Ohh!"

"..Huh?" the girl asked, confused, and honestly went to peek behind him, poor gullible thing. He simply waved her off.

"Nothing, just a joke," he sniffed again.

"Oh.. hehehe," she faked a laugh. "Should I keep goin'... or?"

Richie merely shrugged, honestly ignoring her and the event taking place down below. He didn't feel anything anymore. He was a walking pile of shit and utter numbness. Physically, at least. Emotionally, he still felt it all, the pain, the depression. Just needed another bump, is all. His greatest defense against those stupid goddamn feelings.

"Yea', a'rite," Richie said as Ringo Starr, "Das a guud girl, den... keep'on nommin, eh. He's bo'und t' wake 'ep soonah 'r lat'ar."

The girl smirked and before going back to business, her eyes wandered upward, at what was keeping his focus from the table.

"Ooh," Richie grinned, dabbing a bit of his party favor on the back of his hand and reaching downward. "Need some motivation, do we? Go on, then..."

She covered one of her nostrils and proceeded to snort the drug off of his hand, gasping and then sighing happily, and then went back to taking care of business.

"... *It does get bigger, right..?*" Richie heard the girl ask from his lap, causing him to wince.

"Don't talk with your mouth full, dear," he snapped back, annoyed.

This was all really ruining his buzz, listing to her babble on, sitting there wondering what his life had become, where, at what point, did it begin on such a downward spiral as it was now? He wasn't dense, he knew she was only doing now not to enjoy the quantity time spent with him as a person, just for bragging rights (or complaints) later on, to say she partied with someone famous.

That's how they all treated him. Ever since his divorce and learning his whole marriage had been a sham... Every person he sought attention from afterwards never intended to see him again after a quick roll in the sheets. Not because they truly loved him. Who would, right? A huge fucking phony like 'Rich Records?' No. Never. This is what his life had become, he realized. He was just a story for people to gossip about now.

He stared there looking at the lines of coke on his desk, begging to be snorted so it could snow like there was going to be a blizzard in his brain. Rich lit up a cigarette, letting the smoke burn his lungs and then flow out of his mouth, as he looked down back at his lap and at the girl who was doing nothing for him.

"Fuck it," He spoke to himself and leaned forward, grabbing at his little black straw and began doing the lines. Not just a few of them, all of them. One after the other. Richie zig-zagged his way through the powder, not daring to stop until he reached the very end.

That, as he would come to find out in the next few minutes, turned out to be a serious mistake.

It occurred to Richie after he sat back and felt like he had a sudden case of the sniffles, that the girl he was with had said she brought 'a little something extra to the party!' He hadn't really been paying attention to her because, well, when did he ever give anyone more attention than he gave himself? But now, as he was wiping his nose and feeling the drugs working their way up to his brain, something felt... Different.

He wasn't sure yet if he'd simply done too much at once, or if she had maybe added 'extra flavor' to the mix, but one thing for sure, he had never suffered such a nose bleed from a few dozen lines like this. Rusty pipes? He didn't think so.

"Hey ..." Richie tried to call to the girl, but his voice seemed to slur to slow motion. "Hhheeeey..." He looked down at his hand, which left a trail of faded echoes every which way he moved it. *"Did... You... Put...Something...In...This..."* He asked, or tried to.

The girl bounced up so fast he thought she was a demon for two seconds, moving at a sped-up rate in contrast to his own slow-motion.

"Hehehehehhehehee," the girl laughed like a rabid hyena. "..hah...hah..." he laughed back, but he wasn't sure why. "Just a little bit of DMT! Hehehehehe!" With that, she disappeared under the desk again, leaving Richie sitting there dumbfounded. "..DM...What.." Rich attempted to ask.

Where the fuck had he heard that term before? Richie wondered as the music slowly died out and he was left listening to the faint echos of the girls giggles, which sounded more like a witches' cackle now. Looking down at the fresh blood on his hand again, he suddenly slammed his hand against his chest. His heartbeat was beginning to pick up in pace.

Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop!...

Ba-Doop! - Ba-Doop! - Ba-Doop!

Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop!

Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop!

Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop! Ba-Doop!

"...Hah, shit. I don't ...feel so good... "

Rich found himself in such a deepening, lost thought, surrounded by the darkness of everything his life had come to dwell. He could make himself as physically numb as possible, but it never stopped the emotions from scratching at the surface. The little voices in his head, some of the characters he did, others he didn't know who or what they were, but they all seemed to share the commonality of reminding him how much of a loser he truly had been, and was always destined to be;

Kinky Briefcase, The Sexual Accountant came to him first. "You need my card if you can't get hard!" The voice teased him. "And sonny, it looks to me like that's the least of your problems tonight!"

"Well it's like I always said, Rich...'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit!" The voice of W.C. Fields seemed to bark at him next. "But quittin' is for losers, ain't it, ya damn fool?!"

"You've been a peach, my deah Mista Tozzah," Colonel Buford Kissdrivel sang to him in his little tune of a thick Southern drawl. "A Jawja peach, but yore time is neahly ova!"

"*Batches?!*" Pancho Vanilla's voice asked him. "*Rich doan need noh stinkin batches! He got' everyt'ing he need' right thereh in fron'uh him, doantcha!*"

"*Paper or plastic for these pills to maintain what's left of your sanity, Mr. Tozier?!*" His character, Wyatt the homicidal bag-boy shrieked. "*WhAtEvEr RiCh ReCoRdS wAnTs hE gEtS, RiGHT? BeEp BEeP RiChie! Hahahaha!*"

"*Thingsh are never scho bad, they can't be made worshe, Traschmouth,*" Humphrey Bogart said to him. "*And thingsh are about to get a whoooooo lot worshe for you, buddy boy.*"

"*Aaaaand now! Time to watch the deeeestruction of one RRRRRRRich Reeecords Tozierrrr!*" The MovieTone Newsreel Narrator voice suddenly called out in his head. "*It's going to be one Heeeeeelluva battle!*"

Will he survive? Staaaaaaaaaaaaay tuned!"

"Shut up.. Shaddup! SHUT THE FUCK UP! All of you!" Richie randomly screamed at nobody. They were all in his head. Just voices. That's all.

'*Rebel, Rebel*' by Bowie was playing from his stereo now, and the sounds of the music felt like it was being roared right into his eardrums, making him slam his hands over his ears.

"Ahhh! I need this... off... I gotta turn this off."

Rich fiddled with the remote to his stereo, but only managed to drop it and cause the batteries to burst out of the back and roll away onto the floor. SHIT. He stood up and turned away, dragging the girl with him who seemed to be literally attached at his hips in a death-grip.

"Scuse me, dear," Richie said, trying his best to work his way out of her straddle.

When he finally escaped, he ran to the stereo system tried to turn it off, but the on/off switch didn't seem to have any effect. "Okay, seriously, what the fuck!" Panicking now, he began to try hitting all the buttons, turning every knob, but the music just wouldn't stop. It screeched at him and played backwards, and forwards at an extra high rate, before he finally slammed his fist into it and the stereo landed on dark psychedelic 80's group Oingo Boingo, as their smash hit 'Who do you want to be today' began playing. It was too much for Richie right now.

"FUCK! STOP IT!"

Richie tried to just knock the stereo down, but something was preventing him from doing so.

"...Boy, Ah say, ah say, ah say boy, you bes' not be doin' dat!" Richie looked up to see not just the voice of, but the ACTUAL cartoon character of Foghorn Leghorn right before his eyes, lounging on his fucking stereo like he owned the place. ".. You gotta be fuckin' kiddin' me..." "Whaaa's da big idea!?" Foghorn continued, waving his finger at him. "Ya bes' sit yo ol' tirad ass down now, Trash. Dis shit

right here's a 'bout ta get freakah, ah say boy!" "No, you're not real, you're just a cartoon from when I was a fucking kid..." Foghorn glared at him, and shot him a gesture that he never would have back in those days. "Oh fuck you, too!" .. Richie thought to himself for a moment, blood still streaming down his nose, and then he slapped his own forehead. "Whaaat the fuck am I doing, I'm talking to a fucking cartoon character, come on!"

Richie turned around, away from the cartoon on his stereo. But that's when the shit, as Foghorn had warned him it would, really did get freaky.

"..Oh shit."

Rich Records was having a **BAD TRIP**

The whole penthouse seemed to warp around Richie then, transporting him into what looked like a Picasso painting of his life as he knew it. His home looked abstract as vibrant colors of paint ran right off the walls, flooding and splashing everything he owned.

Richie tried to run, but no matter which way he turned, he ran into the visual of one of his characters.

Colonel Buford Kissdrivel was to his left, standing there looking like a proper caricature of a Southern Gent, smirking at him. "*Ah do declaaare, you are going to diae tonaght, Mista Tozzah.*"

"NO!"

Kinky Briefcase to his right. "*Ya might think about consulting a physician if you experience an erection lasting more than five hours, pal!*"

"AHH!" Richie screamed and tried to run, this time it was Pancho Vanilla in his big ridiculous sombrero.

"*Batches?!*" Pancho asked, and then laughed. "*You doan need no stinkin' batches where YYYORE GOIN, SENORRRR!*"

"LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE!" Richie turned again, but this time he ran right smack dab into Wyatt the homicidal bag-boy, who looked like a maniac out of a Jhonen Vasquez comic. Richie fell to his knees,

looking up at the skeletal skinny freak.

"PaPeR oR pLaAaAaAaAsTiC, FUCKER?!" Wyatt held up a bloody meat cleaver in one hand, and a plastic bag in the other. Blood was leaking from the bag, and when he gave it a little shake, the bag slipped off and he revealed to be holding the decapitated head of Richie Tozier, decaying with maggots leaking from beneath the cracked, bloody lenses of his glasses, and smiling his big, phony smile, even though his lips were morbidly stitched together.

Richie screamed, having his own head shoved in his face, which then, too, ripped the stitches from it's lips and screamed right back at him in a higher pitch, before laughing, and laughing, and laughing.

"AHHHHH! WHAAAT THE ..FFUCK IS THIS!? WHAT IS THIS!? I WANT IT TO BE OVER GODDAMNIT!"

Richie rolled away, crawling before he grabbed onto the edge of his leather sofa and pulled himself to his feet, trying to get away from the deafening music that was making his ears ring to the core. But the music playing wasn't just from his stereo anymore...

From across the room, Oingo Boingo themselves stood on a little stage playing the song. Except it wasn't Danny Elfman and the crew, it was their lively corpses, the flesh melting off their skeletons, all clinging to instruments, their fingernails ripping off and withering away and somehow still with functioning organs, and chunks of flesh hanging off their bones. The singers left eye literally popped from its socket and dangled in front of him as he sang.

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE TODAY?!

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?!

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE TODAY?!

DO YOU WANT TO BE JUST LIKE - SOMEONE ON TV?!

OH BOREDOM IS SO TERRIBLE, IT'S LIKE A DREAD DISEASE!

NOTHING COULD BE WORSE THAN WHEN THERE'S NOTHING ON TV!

*I'D RATHER BE A COWBOY THAN TO STARE BLANK AT THE WALLS!
I'VE BEEN REBORN SO MANY TIMES, I CAN'T REMEMBER THEM ALL
AND I SAY-*

WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE TODAY?!
WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?!
WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE TODAY?!
DO YOU WANT TO BE JUST LIKE SOMEONE ON TV?!

JUST LIKE SOMEONE ON TV, RIGHT?!
DON'T YOU WANT TO BE SOMEONE ON TV RICHIE?!
RICH RECORDS TOZIER, THE BIG FUCKING PHONY!
HAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHA!?

"Oh my .. FUCKING GOD!" Richie screamed, knocking his glasses off his face and covering his eyes with his palms, smearing the blood from his nose all over his face.

"FOR FUCKS SAKE MAKE IT STOP! STOP IT! LEAVE ME ALONE!
STOP IT! ALL OF YOU JUST LEAVE ME ALONE! IT'S NOT REAL!
NONE OF YOU ARE FUCKING REALLLLL!"

Richie turned to run one last time in a ditch effort to escape, do or die. But this time, the figure that blocked him was that of Richie Tozier himself. Or, maybe more so it was the Rich Records persona he had created. Wearing a suit jacket, with an AC/DC t-shirt and jeans, shattered glasses with maggots seeping out of his eyes. This version of Richie was the one he feared the most; the dead one. His mouth was stitched up, but using a microphone with a knife that flung open from the handle like a switch-blade, Dead-Richie slit the stitches open and opened his mouth to speak as maggots poured out.

"Am I real enough for you?" Dead-Richie asked in a gurgled voice. ***"I should be. I am you. I am your future. Take a good look, Trashmouth..."*** It tilted its head to the side, more maggots falling out of his other orifices, and smiled a giant, shit-eating grin at him.

...

And then - Silence.

As Rich opened his eyes, he saw that the characters were gone. The girl, whatever her name was, remained the only other figure there in the room with him, and shouting at him. Suddenly she was pulled from his vision as everything went blurry and he was looking up at

the ceiling, from what he could see of it.

Richie realized he had fallen down to the floor, slam, landing flat on his ass. The girl reappeared in the blurred peripheral and it looked like she was on the phone, shouting, but he heard nothing. Slowly, he saw nothing as well. Black spots began to takeover what little sight he had left, and he was left all alone in that darkness, listening to only the sound of his rapidly beating heart. Which, was slowly now. Passing the beating of a normal race and slowly... slowly... slowing... down...

ba-doop... ba-doop ...ba-doop ...

ba-doop... ba-doop...

...

...

...

beep...

beep... beep...

beep...beep...

beep...beep...

...

"..Beep beep, Richie," he lowly groaned, as he struggled to open up his eyes.

It was so bright where he was now. Was this heaven? Was he seeing the bright light everyone spoke of? Somehow, he doubted it. And it was no longer the sound of his heart beat he heard, but the sound of the machines in the very bright hospital room that were keeping him alive now.

Richie groaned, trying to move but feeling himself to be paralyzed. It felt like he was being weighed down by a million canon balls now.

What he could feel, however, was the slick plastic of his glasses in his right hand. Right up to the tubing of the I.V. in his arm.

"What... the fuck..." He tried to maneuver in the bed, but couldn't.

"What the fuck,' indeed, Rich," the familiar voice of his manager, Steve, said from across the room with stern disappointment in his tone.

"Steve?" Rich asked weakly. "Wh... where am I? What happened?"

"You're in the Saint Joseph Medical Center, and you had a heart attack, is what the fuck happened. Aside effect of the blow you snorted. Did you know it was laced with *Dimethyltryptamine*? What the fuck were you doing with that shit?!"

"*Dimeth...*" It hit Richie then, he groaned. "*DMT*. Fuuuuck."

"Yeeeeeah," Steve said.

Richie could get one eye open and through his blurred vision, barely make out that he was standing there with his arms crossed, looking down at him now. In that moment, he reminded Richie of his father, Wentworth. That bastard was always so disappointed in him, much as Steve was now.

"I was with some chick I met up in the Hills, she must have added that shit to it when I wasn't paying attention-"

"Which you NEVER ARE, RICH!" Steve screamed at him. "You're always in your own little fucking world! The La-La-Whatever the fuck- Rich Records-land!"

"It's cheaper than Disney," Rich said, smirking, figuring he'd get a laugh. Steve did not appease him.

"This isn't fucking funny, man. You don't get it. You could have fucking died tonight, Rich!" Steve screamed again, trying at once to hush his voice. "Do you know what that would have done to my reputation? The agent who hires down-on-his-luck fucking drug addicts who OD?" Steve hissed in a rough whisper.

"Well," Rich said, defeated, "We wouldn't want that to happen. Got forbid my untimely death wounded your career..."

"YOU'RE GODDAMN RIGHT, RICH!"

Steve shook his head, pacing the room with his hands firmly on his hips. Richie just laid there. He attempted to move to get his glasses up to his face, but only got them to his chest before he fell short.

"Look at you," Steve sighed. "You're a fucking mess, Rich. You've dug yourself in a hole that you're just incapable of digging yourself out of, and I'm sick of it, man. I'm done."

"What's that mean, you're 'done?'" Richie asked. "What's that mean, Steve?"

"It means you're on your own from here on out, kid. You're so miserable that want to fucking kill yourself? Go ahead. But I'm not going to be here to help you dig your own grave anymore, buddy. This little stunt of yours is a closing deal for me."

"Oh, come on!" Richie tried to chuckle it off, But Steve couldn't have been serious. "Don't be so melodramatic. You don't wanna quit me! I'm your dream client. I'm the most fun, I'm rich and I'm always in trouble. I'm livin' the dream! L-I-V-I-N'."

"Go to Hell, Rich. The dream is over."

"You know what? Maybe it is. I'm representing myself from now on," Richie shot back. "You're fired."

"Oh - No, you know what? I am SO tired of you. *You're* fired!"

"You can't fuckin' fire me! I fired *you* first!"

The two of them were silent for a moment, before bursting out into laughter. Richie went into a choking fit, and Steve had to rush to his side to hold his chest.

"Easy, buddy. Take it easy."

"I always take it easy," Rich coughed. "And if she's easy, I take her

twice," he tried to wink, but couldn't quite pull it off.

It was in this moment that Steve pushed himself away from Richie, and shook his head. He couldn't do this anymore. The fun times were over. This joke had no punch-line.

"Break a leg, kid," Steve said, and that was that. He made his exit to the door. "Or as you would say, '*Thank you, fuck you and until next time,*' right?"

Richie waited until Steve was damn well near out the door, when his opossum playing finally came to an end and he broke character, so to speak.

"Steve, wait! I'm sorry!" Richie called out frantically, beckoning him to stay. "I don't know what's happened to me, I don't know what I want to do, and I'm sorry I'M SUCH A FUCKING FAILURE! OKAY?!"

Richie used what little strength he had and managed to throw his glasses across the room, figuring they would shatter, almost hoping they would in all honesty. They wouldn't help him right now anyway, his eyes were burning red with tears welling up and pouring down his cheeks with no stopping in sight.

Steve had in fact stopped, he stood half in the doorway and half in the hallway of the hospital, hands in the pockets of his expensive suit and slumped over, looking at the pitiful sight that was once Richie Tozier. Richie couldn't see him, but he knew, somehow, that he was still there.

"I need help, Steve," Richie sobbed. "Okay? I'm so fucked up. I just need help. But no one.. No one wants to help me! All they want from me is another laugh! Another voice! It's all I'm fucking worth anymore and I just need help!" "Alright, Rich," Steve said. "Alright, calm the hell down, I'm still here."

Steve had made his way back over to the side of Richie's bed and took his hand, seeing the poor guy like this almost broke his heart. Almost.

"I'll help... But I don't want to hear any of your shit if I'm going to

stick around to clean up your messes." Steve bent down and retrieved Richie's glasses from the floor, tossing them back at his chest. Much to his surprise, they hadn't broke from the assault. When he picked them up, there wasn't even a scratch on them. Go figure.

"Fine," Richie agreed, no jokes to be made this time. He replaced his specs to his face.

"I want you to go to rehab. Get yourself detoxed, get all that shit out of your system and I'll do my best to keep your names out of the papers. Prove to me you can complete a 90-day stint and then we'll go from there."

"Alright," Richie said, trying to put his arms up, surrendering. "Yeah. Alright..."

He checked into a secure rehab facility the next morning, being admitted under the pseudonym of '*Aloysius Nell*' to remain as anonymous as possible. He didn't exactly know where that name came from or who it belonged to, but suddenly Richie heard the voice of the old cop say in his head and had to smile;

'Ye want to work on that a bit. As of now, ye sound about as Irish as Groucho Marx!'

Richie spent a lot of time to himself in the facility. Detox was the worse, the withdraw was nearly as bad as that near-fatal heart-attack and in times like that, he sometimes wish he hadn't survived at all. There were other celebrities there, but Richie didn't approach them. He only spoke in group, when everyone just sat around putting up with the pity parties they each were throwing, and waiting impatiently for their own turns to talk. When he first arrived, he remembered seeing a line of people in the community room, waiting to look out of a window.

'*Schmucks*,' he thought, and brushed them off. But at the end of the first week, Rich found himself standing in that same line, just to get a glimpse of the outside world. Not that there was even all that much to see, it was just the view of an empty alleyway. But it was something, and something was always better than nothing. Rich had learned to appreciate the little things in life. Only now did he realize

how fragile it truly could be.

On day 89, he spoke to the doctors about being discharged from the clinic, though they weren't sure he was ready. As adamant as Rich was that he wanted to get out there live his life right this time, it turned out that they were the only ones not fooled by his lies. They saw under the mask, they had gotten to spend three months with the real Richard Lionel Tozier. And truth be told? That scared the hell out of him. They advised that he remain in the facility to be treated for his manic depression and severe anxiety, but this was up to him. Any time he spent at the clinic after completing his 90 days was completely mandatory, and he was ready to get the hell out of there.

On his last night, after packing his few possessions so he could leave first thing bright and early, he received a call from his manager. Steve was ecstatic to hear that despite a few close-calls in the first month, Richie had completed his treatment with 'flying colors!'

Steve went on and on about how he had some gigs lined up and how the clubs couldn't wait to get their precious '*Rich Records*' back on their stages.

"Uh huh..." Richie said idly into the phone.

Steve kept talking, but Richie had only heard a few of the first words he spoke. Instead, he began to lose himself in thought. He hadn't been able to listen to music during his stay at the facility and of all things in the world, that's what he missed the most. Instead of hearing Steve flabbergasted about 'the famous return of Rich Records,' Richie's mind slowly drifted to the slow, soothing tune of Iron & Wine's 'Upward Over The Mountain.'

The last thing he heard Steve ask before he hung the phone up, was if he thought he was going to be okay, like truly okay from now on. And he figured he was expected to answer him as honestly as he could. Richie simply said, 'I don't know, man. *I really just don't know.*'"

Mother don't worry, I killed the last snake, that lived in the creek bed...

Mother don't worry, I've got some money I saved for the weekend...

Mother remember, being so stern with that girl who was with me?

Mother remember, the blink of an eye, when I breathed through your

body?

*So, may the sunrise bring hope where it once was forgotten...
Sons are like birds, flying upward, over the mountain...*

*Mother I made it up from the bruise on the floor of this prison...
Mother I lost it, all of the fear of the Lord I was given...
Mother forget me now that the creek drank the cradle you sang to...*

*Mother forgive me, I sold your car for the shoes that I gave you...
So, may the sunrise bring hope, where it once was forgotten...
Sons could be birds, taken broken up to the mountain...*

*Mother don't worry, I've got a coat, and some friends on the corner...
Mother don't worry, she's got a garden, we're planting together...
Mother remember, the night that the dog had her pups in the pantry?
Blood on the floor, fleas on their paws... And you cried 'til the morning...*

*So, may the sunrise bring hope, where it once was forgotten
Sons are like birds, flying always, over the mountain ...*

6. Chapter 6: Self-Destruction of Tozier

(With excerpts from 'IT' by Stephen King)

One year. It had been one year since his little dance with death, and he finally felt like his life was back on track. That's when his phone rang to knock him on his ass all over again.

The call had come completely unexpected. The impact of it hit Rich 'Records' Tozier, Trashmouth as he used to be called back when, like a goddamn truck. Although he hadn't thought of that place, and those losers, and.. IT, in almost three decades, the truth was that Richie had been subconsciously dreading this call for most of his life.

"How much do you remember, Rich?" The man identifying himself as Mike Hanlon, the Homeschool kid from Derry, asked him over the phone. The voice was completely unfamiliar to him, and yet, something about it was very familiar all at the same time. Richie had been mere moments away from doing his time on stage, and now he was suddenly feeling very nervous, almost on the verge of being physically sick. A way he hadn't felt since his first days on stage. But this was something else, a sort of anxiety like he hadn't known since... since...

"Very little," Rich said, and then paused. "Enough, I suppose..."

"Will you come?" Mike asked. "I'll come," Rich said, and hung up.

Not even moments later he was pushing himself away from his manager, Steve Covall, and hurrying out the back door where he hung over the ledge of the balcony, clutching his phone in his hand so tightly it could have snapped under the pressure, and proceeded to vomit like he hadn't since he was just a kid.

"What the fuck?!" Steve had gasped as he opened the door and saw his client retching, hyperventilating. It was bizarre to say the least. "You were fine just like five seconds ago! Who was it? Who called, huh?" Steve demanded.

Richie just stood there trying to catch his breath, trying to push this

feeling of ... Fear, as deep down as that shit it could go.

"Rich? Rich, talk to me," Steve said, reaching into his fancy suit pocket and pulling out a rather expensive silk handkerchief, handing it over to his client. "You're on in two minutes, you good? Cause... You're lookin'... Not good."

Rich overly ignored him, wiping vomit what was left on his chin off and tossing the handkerchief back at his little weasel of a manager.

"I'm fine," Richie said. He was far from it. In fact, this could have been the worst he felt in his entire fucking life.

"Fine? Good. Okay," Steve pulled Richie back into the building and led him to the stage. "Can we get the man a bottle of water?" He called out to a stagehand.

"Bourbon," Richie corrected him. "And some mints."

The alcohol was served to him on the rocks, he hated it that way, but he downed it anyway.

Fuck it.

"I don't think I can do this," Richie said lowly.

"Yes you can. Yes, you can, goddammit, because this is what you get paid to do. You like your life, Rich?"

"Eh..."

"That's what I thought. Well, you live such a luxurious life due to your ability to get your fuckin' ass out on that stage and make with funny ha-ha's. So? Go do it already, your crowd is waiting for ya!"

"How do I look?" Richie asked. Did Steve have it in him to say he looked like shit?

"Like shit," yes, yes he did. "You're shaking."

Richie looked down at the glass, empty of liquor but full of ice cubes that were rattling about now.

"Shit..." Suffice it to say, Rich Records Tozier bombed that night. At least this time he had a reason for it. In truth he had been bombing for the last month, his media accounts were riddled with people demanding refunds for his piss poor performances.

But as his catchphrase went...

"Thank you, Fuck youuuuu, and until next time!"

Mic drop. Tozier, out.

Later that night, Richie found himself sitting in the study of his home. Leaning back in the leather chair behind his desk, looking out at the Pacific Ocean. The clock on the desk — an expensive LED quartz that had been a gift from the talent agency — said that it was 8:09 P.M. on May 28th, 2016. It would, of course, be three hours later where Mike had called from. Derry, Maine. The place he left in '91 and swore never to return again. He felt a prickle of gooseflesh at that and he began to move, to do things.

First, of course, he had to put on a record. Grabbing blindly among the thousands racked on the shelves. Rock and roll was almost as much a part of his life as the comedy and his voices, and it was hard for him to do anything without music playing. The louder the better. The record he grabbed turned out to be a '78 retrospective, an 'oldies' by today's standards. A catchy little tune from The Cars.

Let the good times roll...

Let them knock you around

Let the good times roll...

Let them make you a clown

Let them leave you up in the air

Let them brush your rock and roll hair

Let the good times roll ...

"Not bad," Rich said. He even smiled a little. And at some point during the next hour it occurred to him that as immature and feeble-headed as he could be, he had been allowed to make all of his own final business dispositions in his life... Not to mention, his own

funeral arrangements.

For awhile there, it was Sandy who had been in charge of keeping his life nice and tidy. Sandy Wirt, whom he had met through Steve all those years ago. Their story could be long and sad or a Blondie and Dagwood comic-strip version, but Richie always settled for something in the middle when he thought of her. Had it been love at first sight? Maybe. She was the one who convinced him to ditch the specs and switch to contacts, and then gradually began to try and change everything else about him, too. Nonetheless, shortly after they began something between lust and what he thought was love, they'd decided to legalize the relationship. And with all marriages, the talk of kids arose shortly thereafter. It was mutually decided that it'd be Irresponsible to bring kids into such a shitty, dangerous, overpopulated world - and 'blah-blah-blah, babble-babble-babble.'

They had been young and reasonably idealistic. So, Richie went out and made a deposit in the men's room of the Bank of America, and got his wires cut. The operation went with no problem and there were no adverse aftereffects. And then it was back to the ol' crash-pad to party down and talk about the difference between Maoism and Trotskyism. *'Let the good times roll,'* as the song he was listening to went. But nothing good was ever meant to last, not with Richie Tozier.

Sandy had gotten an offer to join a corporate law-firm in Washington around the same time Richie was beginning to get recognition. No more opening acts, he was going to be the headliner from then on. Though, as Richie would find out, she had gotten the position by putting herself in another... Sandy had been cheating on Rich for who honestly knew how long. She had said that this was her big chance and Richie had to be the most insensitive male chauvinist oinker in the United States to be dragging his feet, and furthermore she'd had it with California anyway. He told her this was also his big chance, the career movie he'd been working so desperately for ever since Steve maybe mistakenly decided to hire him as a client. They thrashed it out, and trashed each other, and at the end of all the thrashing and trashing, Sandy Wirt-Tozier went her own way, and Rich 'Records' went his.

After About a year of short-lived relationships, mostly one-night-

stands with fans who just wanted bragging rights of saying they experienced a less than satisfactory few awkward minutes with 'that comedian,' Richie had woken up with this hobbyhorse about getting the vasectomy reversed. No real reason for it, and he knew from the stuff he'd read that the chances were pretty spotty, but nonetheless he thought, what the hell?

'The good news,' the doc had told him, 'is the operation won't be necessary. The bad news is that anybody you've been to bed with over the last two or three years could hit you with a paternity suit.'

'Are you saying what I think you're saying?' Rich had asked

'I'm telling you that you aren't shooting blanks and haven't been for quite awhile now,' he said. 'Your days of going gaily in bareback with no questions asked have come to an end, Richard. '

Rich thanked him and then called Sandy in Washington. As it turned out, she was already married again. Didn't take her long at all to find someone else, someone better. Expecting, as well, with whoever the hell this 'better' man was. Rich didn't care to ask, and in truth, he didn't want to know.

"When did you change your mind about the immorality of bringing children into such a shitty world?" Rich had heard himself ask her without even really thinking about it.

"When I finally met a man who wasn't a shit," she answered. "I guess I just got a little too old for Rock'n'roll." And with that, the phone clicked. Richie was left listening to the lonely chime of an empty dial-tone. And that was the last he ever heard of Sandy Whatever-the-hell-her-name-was-by-then.

...Bitch, you're never to old to rock'n'roll.

God, that relationship had gotten so completely fucked up, and the others who had come in and out of his life for short barely month-long stints that one might call 'relationships' afterwards had not panned out any better, either. In the end, Richie was alone. He was always alone, and more than that, he knew he was always going to be alone. Call it fate, call it destiny, or maybe just call him a narcissistic asshole who loved himself too much to ever truly love

anybody else. Once upon a time, maybe. These days, all he really felt for himself was an undying amount of disgust and self-loathe.

And now he was expected to just drop everything and go home, to face the friends, the only friends he may have ever truly had. And together, face the very definition of fucking evil. Did he have it in him to honestly do that again? Possibly, maybe, but not definitely. There was one last thing he had to do first. To consider it one 'last' thing sounded so final to him. And hell, maybe it was.

He plucked his cell off the desk with hands that hadn't stopped shaking since earlier that day and dialed his agent, hoping the conversation would go pleasant. Richie doubted it, however.

"Rich," Steve said into the phone with the hint of a sigh.

"Steve," Richie said back, sounding much more enthused.

"How's your mother?"

"Senile."

"Good to know you're taking after her then, ayuh?" Rich laughed. Steve ignored him. He stopped after a moment, 'ayuh?' That was a trait of the people back in Maine, where the hell did that come from?

"See the new issue of News Weekly?" Steve said after a moment.

"Not if I can help it," Rich said. "Anything career-ending worthy?"

"Just a whole article about how my favorite client is managing to fuck that up all on his own."

"As always," Richie shrugged. "But, speaking of your favorite client..."

"Cut the bullshit, Rich. What do you want?"

"A party favor," Richie said. "I'm celebrating tonight."

"Should I be worried?" Steve asked rhetorically, not sounding particularly caring.

"You'd be crazy not to be," Richie snickered.

"How big of a party are we talking?"

"Ten-G's worth."

"Jesus, Rich... That's a helluva lot of blow... I thought you were sober?"

"Yes, well... Desperate times,... old chum." the voice of Adam West said, pausing ever so slightly on his words to give off just the right amount of a Shattner-vibe.

"What, You going to Hefner's again? I thought they kicked you out after your last little hurrah."

"Not tonight. Party o' one here at Mi Casa de Trashmouth, señor..." Pancho Vanilla said with that shit-eating grin of his, twirling his finger around his imaginary mustache.

"Be serious, Rich," Steve said.

"Not even with my life depended on it. See you in twenty. Remember, I'm your favorite client!" and with that, Rich hung up the phone and remained silently seated in the darkness his study, listening to his music.

Though in truth, the sound of his own rapidly beating heart was what he truly listened to now. Eventually he got up and went over to his vault, and proceeded to count out ten grand, that was stuffed into a small bag he had trouble zipping closed. He proceeded to pour himself a drink, not on the rocks this time.

"Here's to living... and to dying, and to all those little bullshit moments in between," Rich told himself, and downed it in one large gulp that nearly caused him to choke.

About half an hour had passed before the doorbell finally rang, and Rich felt hollow with each step he took as he approached the door.

'Every breath you take, every move you make, I'll be watching you...'

Oh, the 80's.

Opening it at last, he saw his manager standing there with a disgraced expression on his face. Rich didn't so much care for that, his attention wandered to the black leather suitcase held in Steve's left hand.

"Thank God for small favors," Richie said, snatching the leather case from Steve.

"Yeah. Well, this favor isn't so small, and I'm not so sure it's God you should be thanking." Richie ignored him and just nodded to the other bag he had left out the dining room table.

Steve followed him inside and took the little bag, but didn't open it, and wouldn't bother counting what was inside. Whether it was the full amount or just a big ol' Fuck You napkin note with 'I-O-U' written on it, Steve wouldn't had been surprised either way. Instead, he reached into his jacket pocket and retrieved a rolled up magazine.

News Weekly.

He tossed it onto the table and Richie glanced at it, uninterested. It was just another horrible photo of him awkwardly smiling and sweating on stage, with a big red headline slapped over it that read 'Rich Records Bombs!'

"Hm, they must be hard-up for material," Richie said nonchalantly and turned his attention back to the leather case. "And tonight's forecast, weeee're lookin' at one HELLUVA blizzard up at the ol' Tozier place," a Newscaster's voice roared from his mouth.

"And if I may be so dubious as to ask," Steve began.

"Ask, you may, hrm, yes..." Richie said in his best Yoda voice.

"..What's the occasion?"

Richie looked up from the case, not at Steve, his eyes just sort of scanned the room for a moment as he licked his finger tip, dabbed it into one of the bags from the case and gave it a lick, rubbing the rest of it on his upper teeth. He never understood the appeal to that, but

it just seemed like the right thing to do when you dance this tango.

"Stuff."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Things and stuff," Richie fired back.

"Things and stuff that are worth you ruining a year of sobriety?"

"Goddamn with all these fucking questions, man," Richie sighed to himself. "You might be sorry you asked," he told Steve.

"Try me."

"I have to go away for awhile... It might be a long while, I don't know yet." He finally put the suitcase down and turned to his manager with a look that said, no, he was not joking. "I need a couple of days, at least."

"You're not serious, are you?" Steve finally asked. He sounded plaintive. "You've got gigs in Reno coming up, Rich. I mean, unless your mother just died or you've got to have a brain tumor or something ... Is your mother sick? Did she God-forbid die?"

"Yeah, died ten years ago."

"Have you got a brain tumor?"

"Not even a rectal polyp," Rich said before scrunching his face and going for a reach, "Actually, now that I think about it..."

"This is not funny, Rich."

"Yeah, and for the first time in a long time, my whole life maybe, I'm not laughing."

"You're being a cryptic asshole is what you're doing, and I don't like it."

"I don't like it either, but I have to go."

"Where? Why? What..."

"That just leaves 'Who' and 'When,' right?"

"Goddamn it! Talk to me, Rich!"

"You remember when I got a call earlier and threw up?" Rich asked. Steve nodded. "It was someone I used to know a long time ago. In another place, in another time. Back when something happened.. I made a promise. We all promised, that we would go back if the something started happening again. And I guess it has."

"What something are we talking about, Rich?"

"I'd just as soon not say.. Also, as crazy as it is to admit the truth... I don't remember."

"When did you make this infamous promise?" Steve scoffed.

"A lifetime ago. In the summer of '89 if memory serves, and I wish it didn't."

There was another long pause, and he knew Steve Covall was trying to decide if Rich 'Records' Tozier, aka Buford Kissdrivel, aka Wyatt the Homicidal Bag-Boy, etc. was having him on, or was having some kind of mental breakdown.

"You would have been just a kid," Steve said flatly.

"Thirteen or so," Richie considered. "Math was never my strong suit."

Another long pause. Rich waited patiently.

"All right..." Steve said at last. "I'll shift the rotation — I can call Chuck to pull a few shifts, I guess, if I can find what motel he's currently holed up in. I'll do it because we go back a long way together. But I'm never going to forget you kicked out on me, Rich."

"Oh, bite my bag, you annoying little imp," Rich snapped, feeling a headache coming on that was progressively getting worse. He knew what he was doing; did Steve really think he didn't? "I'm just asking for a few days off, is all. You're acting like I took a shit on the stage, when all I did was vomit behind the curtain."

"Yeah. A few days off. But, for what? The reunion of your Cub Scout pack in Shithouse Falls, North Dakota, or Pussyhump City, West Virginia?"

"Actually, I think Shithouse Falls in Arkansas, bo," Buford Kissdrivel said in his big hollow-barrel voice, but Steve could not to be diverted.

"Because you made a promise when you were a kid? Kids don't make serious promises for Christ's sake Rich, and you know it! Keep in mind that this is not an insurance company; this is not a law office. This is show-business, be it ever so humble, and you fucking well know it. You are putting my balls to the wall, so don't you insult my intelligence!" Steve was nearly screaming now, and Rich closed his eyes.

"Inside voices, please," Richie said sarcastically.

"I'm never going to forget this," Steve said, and Rich supposed he never would. But Steve had also said kids didn't make serious promises, and that wasn't true at all. Rich couldn't even remember what the promise had been — wasn't sure he wanted to remember — but it had been plenty serious.

"Steve, I have to go, I wish I didn't, fucking believe me. But—"

"Yeah, yeah," Steve waved him off impatiently. "And I told you I would handle it. So go ahead. Enjoy your trip to memory lane, if you have enough blow to take you the whole way."

Steve turned around and began heading out of the house, leaving Richie there with nothing but the small black leather case, and the copy of News Weekly that he graciously had been planted upon the cover.

"What, no hug?" Rich called out to him, but didn't get a response. Instead, he only heard the door slam. "Well then, '*Thank you, fuck youuuuuu, and until next time!*'"

Richie smirked, quoting himself and his stupid fucking catch phrase. He was surprised how often he could use that off stage, as well as on.

'Cause I'm a picker

*I'm a grinner
I'm a lover
And I'm a sinner
Playin' my music in the sun*

*I'm a joker
I'm a smoker
I'm a mid-night toker
I get my lovin' on the run...*

Richie clung to the leather case and snatched up the News Weekly, as he made his way through his large home. He was sometimes surprised by the thought that he was almost — not quite, but almost, a rich man. All courtesy of going on stage and making people laugh with stupid jokes, most of them just stories he had experienced in his life with a fictional and comedic twist on them to make the crowd chant. And the voices, of course. Those always sold the stories.

House, stocks, insurance policy, even a copy of his last will and testament. The strings that bind you tight to the map of your life, he thought. There was a sudden wild impulse to whip out his Zippo and light it all up, the whole whore's combine of wherefores and know-ye-all-men-by-these-present's and the-bearer-of-this-certificate-is-entitled's. And he could do it, too. The papers in his safe had suddenly ceased to signify anything.

The first real terror struck him then, and there was nothing at all supernatural about it. It was only a realization of how easy it was to trash your life. That was what was so scary. Just dragged the fan up to everything you had spent the years raking together and turned the motherfucker on. Easy. Burn it up or blow it away, then just take a powder. Behind the papers, which were only currency's second cousins, was the real stuff. The cash; four thousand dollars in tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds. Taking it now, he wondered if he hadn't somehow known what he was doing when he put the money in here — fifty bucks one month, a hundred and twenty the next, maybe only ten the month after that. Rathole money. Taking-a-powder money.

'Man, that's a fucking horrorshow,' he said in a whisper, barely aware he had spoken at all.

It all was slowly coming back to him now. What a pitiful bunch of losers

they were, with their little clubhouse in what had been known then as the Barrens. Remembering Stanley Uris. 'Stanley Urine,' the big kids called him, a Jewish kid who thought the rest of his friends were crazy, even seeing the clown didn't make it real for him; Bill Denbrough, who could say nothing but 'Hi-yo, Silver!' without stuttering so badly that it drove you almost as bug-shit as Richie's annoying voices did to the others; Beverly Marsh, with her bruises and her cigarettes rolled into the sleeve of her blouse; Ben Hanscom, Haystack, they called him, who had been so big he looked like a human version of Moby Dick, little asthmatic Eddie Kaspbrak and his overbearing whale of a mother; Mike Hanlon, the homeschool kid who was the last to join their little party. And Richie Tozier himself, of course, with his thick coke-bottle glasses and his trash mouth, and his face which just begged to be pounded into new and exciting shapes.

How it came back, how all of it came back... and now he stood here in his luxury bathroom, shivering as helplessly as a homeless mutt caught in a thunderstorm, shivering because the guys he had run with weren't all he remembered. There were other things, things he hadn't thought of in years, trembling just below the surface. Bloody things. A darkness. Some darkness. The house on Neibolt Street, and Bill's battle-cry of; 'I go home and all I see is that Georgie isn't there. His clothes, his toys, his stupid stuffed animals, but he isn't. So walking into this house, for me... Is easier than walking into my own.'

Did he remember? Just enough not to want to remember any more, and you could bet your fur on that. A smell of garbage, a smell of shit, and a smell of something else. Something worse than either. It was the stink of the beast, the stink of IT, down there in the darkness under Derry where the machines thundered on and on. Rich had blocked all of that out of his memory. But sometimes those things come back, oh yes indeedy, they come back, sometimes they come back.

Rich Tozier whispered to himself; "Going home now, God help me, I'm going home. Fuck it."

He felt again how easy it had been to slip through an unsuspected fissure in what he had considered a solid life. How easy it was to get over onto the dark side, to sail out of the blue and into the black. Out of the blue and into the black, yes, that was it. Where anything might be waiting. And a conviction stole over him that he would never see any of this life again,

that he was a dead man walking.

He thought with some amazement that the atmosphere has changed in the room. Richie had felt a mad, exhilarating kind of energy growing as he made his way to the bathroom. He'd tossed the magazine in the counter and took one of the little baggies from the briefcase. High quality stuff, he'd gotten his moneys worth, for sure. Pouring the powdered substance right over his face on the cover of News Weekly, he began to cut the coke into several large lines. He'd never been much good at doing so, but it would suffice tonight.

He had done cocaine on and off over the last couple of years, at parties, mostly. Always lying to himself that he didn't have a problem. He could stop whenever he wanted, the lie every addict tells themselves. Coke wasn't something you wanted just lying around your house if you were a quasi-celebrity. A little here or there, just to try it, at first. Just to give him that extra little zest for an entertaining stage presence. And the feeling he got from each snort was something like that, but not exactly. This feeling was purer, more of a mainline high. He thought he recognized the feeling from his childhood, when he had felt it every day and had come to take it merely as a matter of course. He supposed that, if he had ever thought about that deep-running energy as a kid (he could not recall that he ever had), he would have simply dismissed it as a fact of life, something that would always be there.

And maybe, Richie thought, that's the scary part. How you don't stop being a kid all at once, with a big explosive bang, like one of that fucking clown's balloons. The kid in you just leaked out, like the air out of a tire. And one day you looked in the mirror and there was a grownup looking back at you.

Richie looked at himself in the mirror and thought; there's a man who's going crazy, getting ready to commit suicide, maybe.

"Party of one... It's not over 'til you're in the emergency room, pal," Richie said to himself, this time without chuckling. There were no chucks to have here. Not tonight.

Richie Tozier pulled his glasses free from his face and dropped them on the counter beside the magazine that so gracefully featured him

on the cover. 'Rich Records' Bombs!' he read, for the first time actually took a good look at the damn thing.

"Flattery, my dear," he spoke in a perfect Orson Bean voice, "gets you nowhere."

Looking now not at the cover of his sweaty face, but the lines of coke he'd cut on top of it, a realization finally came to him; this amount of cocaine could be lethal, he thought. No, it would be. He knew that. Hell, he welcomed it, he begged for death. Anything but to go back to that place and face the true terrors of his childhood. Pink Floyd's 'Comfortably Numb' was now playing on his stereo and it all the company he needed on this journey, this last hurrah, right Steve?

Looking down at where his money had gone, on those thickly cut lines of 'bolivian marching powder,' Rich knew he would probably drop dead before he even got to the last one. He hoped he would, anyway, and he'd go out in a wave of sheer bliss before then.

He started at the top line. "Ah, 'old habits never die, they just hibernate.' Right, Rip?"

Putting the little black pipe to his nose, Rich knelt down and in his weather man voice, announced; "And the forecast is... cloudy in the mountains, sunny in the valleys, and snow flurries up your nose." Rich snorted the first line like it was the last thing he was ever going to do and was making damn sure it counted for something. If he was so lucky, it would be. The gesture felt so perfectly and scarily familiar to him. A flash of memories, not of the Derry days, but of all the partying he'd done in his time happened before his eyes. Of which, there had been plenty. With the amount of livin', (L-I-V-I-N') he had done in the last decade, he was shocked to still be standing.

Rich went to take another snort, bending downward as he suddenly felt his stomach churn and that sick burning of acid reflux hitting the back of his throat. Heaving, he pushed himself away from the counter and went into a coughing fit. The kind of fit he used to have when he was a smoker, the only form of socially acceptable suicide and a habit he'd picked up in his twenties that stuck with him until he quit four years ago.

"Come on, Tozier," he told himself. "Get a grip, man. This is the good stuff, the good shit. Just like the good ol' fucked up days." He tried again, looking down at what remained and having to stop himself once more. Shit, he'd made seven of them. Seven lines, seven losers. What the fuck do you know about this. One down, six to go. He took a deep breath and exhaled, momentarily wishing he had been breathing cigarette smoke into his lungs. Game time. Richie moved back to the counter, this was it. Nothing but him and Floyd and those lines.

*Hello (hello, hello...)
Is there anybody in there?
Just nod if you can hear me
Is there anyone at home?*

*Come on (come on) now..
I hear you're feeling... down
Well I can ease your pain
Get you, on your feet again*

*Relax (relax, relax...)
I'll need some information, first
Just the basic facts...
Can you show me where it hurts?*

"Do it," Richie told himself over the music. "Just... fucking.." His eyes were already blood-shot red and beginning to tear, but it wasn't from the drugs. This was the moment, make or break, live or die. He leaned back down and replaced the pipe to his nostril. Rich snorted another line. The toxins swam up his nose, but that's all he felt anymore. No high, no relief, nothing. He was numb. This time as he pulled away, he saw his own eyes on the magazine beneath him.

"I can't," he said with a voice that was broken, unlike any of the voices he had done before. This was his real voice. Looking down at himself on the magazine that was progressively getting more blurry the further away he pulled, both from his poor vision and the tears continuing to form. "I can't do this, I can't .." Richie sobbed pitifully. Finally, he looked at his reflection in the mirror beside him.

"You.." Richie said to himself, looking at the remnants of the drug

scattered all over his face. He didn't recognize himself anymore. He wasn't even looking at a real person. This was just another one of his characters. "You.. FUCKING NOBODY!" Richie screamed and thrust his fist into the mirror, shattering it. "YOU WORTHLESS.. FUCKING.. NOTHING! IT'S ALL FAKE! FUCKING FAKE! EVERYTHING IS GODDAMN FUCKING FAKE!"

He began thrashing about the room, grabbing the magazine that rightly bashed him for his poor performance and ripping it in half, creating a cloud of what once was ten grand worth of substance. "NOTHING! NOBODY! FUCKING LOSER!" It didn't stop, his heart was racing, Richie knocked all his worthless awards off the shelf, all those stupid framed pictures from the walls. It all came crashing down, and along with it, Richie's sanity.

Finally he came to a stop. Throwing himself against the wall, Richie sobbed not just in pain, but in complete anguish. He slid all the way to the floor and wrapped his arms firmly around his knees, this was the closest thing to a hug he'd felt in years. And through his tears, Richie actually began laughing. Rather hysterically, too. Morbidly so, and at the irony of it all. He was nothing, nobody, as fake as all his voices. And yet, through it all, the one truth Richie Tozier finally was able to come to the conclusion of was that he was simply didn't have it in him kill himself.

No O.D.
No death.
Not tonight.

No ... *That* was waiting for him, back in Derry.

*... There is no pain you are receding,
A distant ship smoke on the horizon.
You are only coming through in waves.
Your lips move..
but I can't hear what you're saying...*

*When I was a child, I had a fever,
My hands felt just like two balloons...
Now I've got that feeling once again
I can't explain you would not understand*

This is not how I am...

I ... Have become... Comfortably numb...

Richie leaned over and began to violently vomit again, making a mess all over himself and adding to the floor, already covered in the shards of his belongings. He slid across the slick tiles to the toilet on his knees like some weird break-dancer, gripped the edges, and vomited everything he had left in his guts.

"Alright," Richie spat through a strained voice, pushing himself up with hands that trembled. In fact, his whole body was shaking at that moment.

"Okay, I get the point. No more of this shit. I got the fuckin' memo..."

He made his way back to the bathroom and grabbed a towel, wiping the bile off his face. He reached down and snagged his glasses off the counter. Somehow, through his rampage, they had been the only things left untouched. Go figure, it's as if they were mocking him. He replaced them to his face and looked at himself again in what remained of the mirror. The Animals 'It's my life' now filled the house as he wiped what was left of the tears off his cheeks.

"Alright then." Richie said to himself. "Let's go back to Derry, you fucking loser."

7. Chapter 7: Richie Tozier Comes Home

(With co-writer Darkness Falls)

Twenty-Seven years... Shit, where does the time go?

Having moved out of Derry in '91 and after twenty-five impossible years, Richie 'Trashmouth' Tozier had finally come home. But had he, truly? It didn't feel like it yet. Don Henley's *'The Boys of Summer'* blared from WZON (a station that declared itself 'Bangor's AM stereo for classic 80's rock!') on the radio and just up ahead he saw a sign which has caused the flesh of his back to break out in hard ridges of goose-flesh;

Penobscot County - Derry, Maine.

He narrowly swerved past a turtle that was taking its' sweet-ass time crossing the road, and suddenly he was in Derry again, and the memories he had all but forgotten came flooding back like a broken dam. Like the Dam in the Barrens.

"The Dam..." Richie heard himself think aloud, over the music playing. "That goddamn dam... 'Fess up, Eds — who built the dam?" Richie asked no one now, but that summer day in '89 he had asked the question to Eddie Kaspbrak, who had been down in the Barrens with Bill, 'Big Bill' Denbrough and Ben 'Haystack' Hanscom. Stan 'the Man' Uris was there, too. They had gone down there together after their run-in with the ever so crazy Henry Bowers and that Hanscom kid.

"This must have been your idea," Richie had said to Hanscom, as he knelt down and swept a hand at the spreading pool of water. "These wet ends couldn't light a firecracker with a flamethrower."

Richie began laughing, God, he was such a little shithead back then. His eyes wandered up to his rear-view where he glimpsed at himself and Richie came to the screeching halt of the realization that, not much had really changed in nearly thirty years. Once a trashmouth, always a trashmouth.

Richie idly reached over with his right hand and fished a Winston out of the packet that laid in his empty passengers seat. What was he doing? He had quit four years ago, but he could use one right now, all right. Just one. With shaky hands, he lit it up with his zippo, a gesture that already felt as familiar to him as pushing his old glasses back up the bridge of his nose after wearing contacts for half of his life now, he thought, "*Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should.*" *Ain't that right, Eds?*"

Richie shook his head. He really didn't know how his old friends, those fellow Losers' Club members ever tolerated him as much as he did. He passed the old cinema and arcade, long since closed down and now with nothing more than a faded 'Thanks for the memories, Derry' sign remaining of once what was, and missing a few letters here and there. That was enough reminiscing for awhile, Richie thought as he slammed the knob of his radio and spun it away from WZON, cranking it now to WKIT-FM as Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds came on. The song would carry him through the rest of the town as he made his way through the night and to the restaurant good ol' Homschool Hanlon had told him to meet at, a Chinese joint called Jade of the Orient. a town that to him, had the stench of death heavy in the air. Oh, it was great to be back in Derry, breathing in that old .. Derriere.

*Hey, little train, we are all jumping on...
The train that goes to the Kingdom
We're happy, Ma, we're having fun
And the train ain't even left the station...*

*Hey, little train, wait for me...
I once was blind, but now I see
Have you left a seat for me?
Is that such a stretch of the imagination?*

*Hey little train, wait for me...
I was held in chains, but now I'm free
I'm hanging in there, don't you see?
In this process of elimination...*

"What the fuck are you doing, Tozier?" Richie heard himself ask.

The red Mustang he had rented out of Bangor International was no where as good as the one he had back home in L.A., but it would suffice for now. He'd hoped to be back in Derry before nightfall, make an appearance, say his 'hello's' to the people he was apparently friends with but had long since forgotten, and then get the hell outta dodge. That way he could say he still showed up and then could be out of there just as fast. But that didn't go exactly as planned. It was already dark before he even got out of Bangor, and had only just crossed the county line to Derry.

Fuck. Shit.

It was too quiet, so he switched the radio back to the oldies station and cranked it up just in time to catch the ending to Steppenwolf's "*Magic Carpet Ride*," which prompted a little chuckle out of him. What a ride this would be, indeed. Richie began fumbling around his leather jacket pockets for his cigarettes, but found something else instead.

Keeping his eye on the road, he retrieved the tiny packet of candy from his pocket. Not just any kind of 'candy,' either. The expensive kind. The Hollywood party favor. He'd just spent ten grand on a bundle of which he'd intended to overdose on the night before, and thought it'd all gone to waste. But now with shaky hands, he fiddled with the temptation held the little packet.

Dare he?

"...Alright," Richie said. "Just one bump. That's all I need. Just like going on stage, just enough to get me through the next hour. That's all." The road was pretty straight ahead, so he didn't feel the need to pull over. Biting the tip off the wrapper, he leaned forward and dabbed the smallest little bump on his dashboard. Leaning forward, he sniffed it up, gasping. Looking at the rest of the packet, he decided 'fuck it' and poured the rest of it out into a crooked line, leaning back down to give every last gram a sniff.

I looked -

Around -

A lousy candle's all I found

*Well, you don't know what -
We can find
Why don't you come with me little girl...
On a magic carpet ride
Well, you don't know what
We can see
Why don't you tell your dreams to me
Fantasy will set you free*

*Close your eyes girl...
Look inside girl...
Let the sound take you away...*

Richie leaned back upward, he'd gotten his zest, all right.
"Zzzzzzziiiiing!" He said with a laugh- before -

"Oh SHIT!"

He grabbed the wheel just in time as he swerved to the left, mere seconds before he'd managed to drive right off the road and end up dead in the canal. That was all he needed. Luckily he'd gotten himself straightened out, as he sniffed deeper and gave his nose a rub. Stuff always gave him the tickles.

Ted Nugent's "*Stranglehold*" was now blaring from his radio as he continued down the road, coming to a big, red light at an intersection. There was no other traffic in the town at that moment, but he stopped nonetheless. He seized the opportunity flip a switch and let the top of his convertible slowly slide down into place, the fresh air would feel cool on his face, which was now burning up. Derry air, he thought. Derriere, he chuckled.

And that's when he saw her. Looking around a moment ago, he could have sworn the town was dead and there was no one around for what appeared to be miles. But now, he was locking eyes with a woman who was standing just off to the road. She wasn't bad looking, either. It looked as if Derry had upped it's game in the last 27 years. He gave a quick look around, and then looked back to her with a smile. Maybe she knew who he was, that he was famous. De Trashmouth, man of a thousand voices. Had appeared on TV several times, and was even in the middle of a comedy tour. He had gigs coming up in

Reno, and was gonna make sure he lived to see them, despite this little detour in Derry. Hell, in this moment, he didn't even remember why the hell he'd come back all. Just that he'd promised to, but why? For what? That didn't matter anymore. He gave a huge grin at the girl on the side of the road, and shrugged.

"Hey, miss," Richie called out, beckoning her over. What was the worse that could happen? Maybe his time in Derry wouldn't be so bad, after all.

Tall, slender sexual, the female had purses lips and curves that most men wouldn't travel without some serious balls. A smile pulled at blood red velvet soft lips. She looked the type to lean a window and give a man a hefty quote for a night visit.

She said nothing when he called her. Her body spoke volumes. Hips sway and breasts. Supple, perky, and shaped heaved up when she leaned toward him. A voice finally came from her like smooth silk.

"Hey there handsome, give a gal a ride? I'm alittle far from home. I would totally owe you, stud." She gave the comedian a wink before leaning herself over the window, giving him a damn good look. Her head tilting to make her raven locks spill over her left shoulder. She was a score by any mans standards, the type of woman that was into the kinda shit good girls just didn't do.

Richie had a weird thing about anxiety. Even though he'd just snorted most of his negative feelings away, now he was suddenly feeling it all coming back. Was this really happening right now? He gave a quick look around to make sure this wasn't some kind of scheme, living in L.A. had taught him to be cautious. Paranoid for his own protection, even. But, this was Maine. Fucking Derry. No one around here was smart enough to pull off a ploy like that.

"Well..." Richie began. "There is somewhere I have to be... But, fuck it. They've waited 27 years, another hour won't kill 'em." If only Richie had known then the irony of such a statement. "Whatcha waitin' for? Hop the fuck in- Pardon my French, if you're a religious woman," Richie smirked.

It almost seemed too good to be true. He momentarily thought of

some old story he'd heard about. 'La... Llorona' or some shit. or 'The woman in white,' Ghost story, hitchhiker type of thing. Or a succubus situation. Whichever, stuff like that only happened in the movies. Not real life. Never. The red light above him took its sweet ass time changing to green, but he looked over and shrugged. "No time like the present," Richie said, and in his utter narcissism and vainness, honestly wondered if anyone from Derry would recognize him as the famous comedian who was gracing the little nothing-town with his presence.

The female smiled in such a seductive way it fit her next words. "Do I look religious to you stud?"

She pulled the door gently and slid in the seat beside him. Richie tozier falling for a pretty face when a entity wore a sexual mask. A pretty face looked at him but what sat in that seat was nothing of the sort.

She slipped a hand to his thigh, a soft touch but held the meaning behind its intention. "I do worship but it's usually in the bedroom. Saying the name loudly..in a tone you look like your familiar with. Richie tozier right?"

Well this would certainly be an interesting way to kill an hour, so to speak. Before it had just been Richie and the road, and some classic tunes and a little bit of the ol' 'Bolivian Marching Powder' to help with nerves and whatnot.

Now he was in the company of was pretty damn fine lady. They didn't even make them this good in Hollywood. It was honestly like a lot of plastic, Botox tailored Frankenstein monsters out there, they were all so fake. He hadn't even felt a real pair of tits since the early 2000's. Since his divorce from Sandy. But no reason to think of her now, when he had a ripe luscious thing sitting next to him.

The Mustang sped off and Richie kept eyeing her through his glasses, smirking when she acknowledged his name.

"Oh, so you've heard of me?" He grinned. Good to know that people in such a small town probably spoke of him. *'Remember that gangly little four-eyed trashmouth fuck? Yeah he's famous now, ayuh.'* he figured they said. *Yeah, who's the loser now?*

She glanced in his direction but her eyes had a faded color to them. They were getting blurry as if it was a corpse sitting beside him. "You know I'm a comedian of sorts. I make children laugh."

An eerie chill ran up his spine. Suddenly, he was regretting picking this girl up. He knew it was too good to be true. The moment she mentioned children...

The song on the radio seemed to change all on it's own then, no longer was the classic rock Richie had been raised on playing in the night, but a different song played now. It sounded like children singing, though as the music kept playing, the cheerful voices began to sound more guttural, almost like croaking gurgles, growling...

*Oranges and lemons...
Say the bells of St Clement's...
You owe me five farthings ...
Say the bells of St Martin's ...*

Richie's eyes crept back over to her, but she was changing. So much for shit like this only happening in horror flicks, he officially felt like he was in a scary movie come to fucking life. As he turned towards her again, he saw that her face was now bone-white, with two very familiar red lines drawn down her face. Her voice was changing as she... No, not she, it. IT. As IT gradually took over. It was the clown. That fucking clown.

The voice was changing, twisting. Her face now painted white...red lines pulling at her face. "I make children laugh. I also make them...die."

With that the form changed, pulled tore into something richie had long since forgotten. "Won't kill them? Oh yes, yes Richie Richie it will! Hooohoho! I will kill all of you! I will feed on you and all of you. Go back little Richie. Go home. Or you will die here!"

"Oh fu-" he couldn't even speak. Richie was petrified beyond belief. He pulled the car into the middle of the road with a deafening SCRRRREEEEEEEECH and within seconds he threw himself from the car and onto the road. Thank god he'd put the top down, he didn't even open the door, he just flung himself up and over it and hit the ground with a forceful impact. Rolling away from the car, he

struggled to keep his glasses on, holding both arms of them tightly as he slammed his eyes shut.

"IT ISN'T REAL IT ISN'T REAL," he began chanting in a panic. "IT ISN'T REAL IT ISN'T REAL! GO AWAY!" he kept his eyes locked shut and begged, prayed, that thing in his car would be gone when he found the courage to open his eyes again.

Gone it was. Nothing left of that girl from moments before. Only a red balloon sat tied to the wheel of his on its plastic surface as it rotated in his direction was the simple words.

'Come home.' The challenge each loser would be welcomed to Derry with. 'Come home losers. Come play.'

Richie at last opened his eyes as he heard the horrific cackling of IT's laughter die down. He told himself not to believe it was there anymore, to take away that bit of fear he'd been serving up to it on a silver goddamn platter, and it worked. His memory of 1989 was still hazy at best, but it was all starting to become clear to him now. In this moment he remembered the day he had been attacked by IT in the form of the hideous Paul Bunyan statue in the center of the town.

When he finally braved the chance of opening his eyes, he looked up and saw she.. IT.. was indeed gone. Had he maybe just imagined the whole fucking thing? Maybe he'd gotten a bad cut of coke, is all. He'd already experienced horrible hallucinations the time a girl snuck a little DMT into the mix. That's all it was, probably. Maybe. Hopefully.

"Okay, Tozier ... get a grip, man..." Richie uttered to himself, slowly but surely reclaiming what was left of his sanity. Of course it had been a ploy by IT. He remembered that now.. IT could take the form of anything it wanted, forms it picked from their minds and greatest fears to lure them in... then scare the shit out of them before going in for the kill. "Lesson learned... No more hitch-hiking hookers."

But that's when he caught something out of the corner of his eye. Something red and shiny. Not the clown... Just a remnant of it, a reminder that it had been there. A red fucking balloon. Richie sat up and adjusted his glasses, realizing he was doing so with terribly shaking hands and moving so fast, he thought for sure he'd be sick.

He read the message on the balloon. It said; 'Come home,' but he read it as 'fuck you.'

Richie turned over, burning acids hitting the back of his throat, and proceeded to vomit all the fuck over the road. He hadn't eaten much since the phone call from Mike to come back to this dreadful place known as Derry, so it was mainly just dry heaving and stomach acids that splattered on the ground.

He jumped in place, startled, as the balloon drifted past him as if pulled on a string, and he looked up, seeing where it was floating towards. He was in City Center, and the balloon was headed right towards his old nemesis. Richie looked up at the old statue of Paul Bunyan, patron saint of Derry

'Old Paul,' he thought. 'What you been doing since I've been gone? Makee any new riverbeds, coming home tired and dragging your ax behind you? Made any new lakes on account of wanting a bathtub big enough so you could sit in water up to your neck? Scared any more little kids the way you scared me that day?'

Richie finally pushed himself off the ground, sliding his hands into his pockets and finally finding his pack of cigarettes. He took one out and lit it with still shaking hands.

"Hey there, Paul. Tall Paul," Richie said up to the statue, hoping to fuck it wouldn't respond. "I'm here to say you're the same in every way, ain't aged a motherfuckin' day..."

The balloon had drifted right up beside ol' Paul's ax, and suddenly BURST into a million little rubber pieces. The sound was glass-shattering, like the firing of a fucking canon, causing Richie to drop his cigarette and choke on the smoke.

"Ahh! AHHH!" He shrieked, wasting no time hopping back into the car, this time opening the door to do so, and slamming it shut. He pulled the switch to bring the top back down and frantically rolled up his window, taking off into the night without the company of a woman, or IT, or anything, except the music of the good ol' Doobie Brothers, that he hoped with slowly begin to soothe him.

*Don't you feel it growing, day by day...
People... getting ready for the news...
Some are happy, some are sa-aaaaa-ad
Woah, gotta let the music play...
Mhm*

*What the people need, is a way to make them smile
It ain't so hard to do if you know how...
Gotta get a message, get it on through...
Oh now mamma, don't you ask me why...*

*Woah, ohhhhhh listen to the music
Woah, ohhhhhh listen to the music
Woah, ohhhhhh listen to the music
All the tiiiiii-iiii-ime...*

By time he finally arrived to the Jade, his stomach felt as if it was going to implode. He definitely had no appetite in sight, and honestly wondered how this was going to go. Every instinct he had told him to just leave. Don't come back. He'd barely escaped this town alive all those years ago, who was to say he'd be this lucky this time? Richie turned the engine off though, and just sat there in silence, wondering if he was going to be sick again. That nervous feeling never went away. And in the quiet of the night, he suddenly heard voices. Not unpleasant voices, in fact, vaguely familiar ones. Familiar, yes, but different all the same. Looking out his window now, he saw a tall, slender figure and a woman of shorter frame, but with strikingly vibrant auburn hair.

'I'm sorry, who invited Molly Ringwald into the group?' Richie remembered once saying to her. Was that her? Had he been expecting his friends to not grow up the way he did? Smirking, Richie finally exited his car and slammed the door, breaking up this tender reunion happening before him.

"Wow. You two look amazing," he said, sounding less than enthused.
"What the fuck happened to me?"

Seeing them made it real, just like seeing the other losers would as well. So much had changed in almost three decades.. And yet? So much hadn't changed at all.

This was the moment when Richie Tozier felt like he had finally come home.